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SITTING DAYS—2009

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—FIFTH 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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<td>ALP</td>
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Members of the House of Representatives

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
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<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;
Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

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

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**Rudd Ministry—continued**

- Minister for Veterans’ Affairs: Hon. Alan Griffin MP
- Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women: Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
- Minister for Home Affairs: Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
- Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery: Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
- Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs: Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
- Assistant Treasurer: Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
- Minister for Ageing: Hon. Justine Elliot MP
- Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport: Hon. Kate Ellis MP
- Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change: Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP
- Minister for Employment Participation and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery: Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
- Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government: Hon. Maxine McKew MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water: Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia: Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction: Hon. Bill Shorten MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance: Hon. Bob McMullan MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs: Hon. Duncan Kerr SC, MP
- Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade: Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion: Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
- Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services: Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Employment: Hon. Jason Clare MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Health: Hon. Mark Butler MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation: Hon. Richard Marles MP
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<tbody>
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<td>The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>The Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nick Minchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
<td>The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design</td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources</td>
<td>The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. David Johnston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Attorney-General</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>The Hon. John Cobb MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts</td>
<td>Mr Steven Ciobo</td>
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[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law</td>
<td>The Hon. Chris Pearce MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Smith MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities</td>
<td>The Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government</td>
<td>Mr Scott Morrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Mrs Margaret May MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Mrs Louise Markus MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare, Status of Women and Youth</td>
<td>Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs</td>
<td>The Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Training and Sport</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Southcott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Ian Macdonald</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport</td>
<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development</td>
<td>Mr John Forrest MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources</td>
<td>Mr Barry Haase MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Mitch Fifield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation</td>
<td>Mr Mark Coulton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration</td>
<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Lindsay MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Brett Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and Public Security</td>
<td>Mr Jason Wood MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
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Tuesday, 23 June 2009

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

OzCar

Mr TURNBULL (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister stand by his answer in question time on 4 June concerning the Bennelong—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Those on my right will sit in silence while others have the call.

Mr TURNBULL—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister stand by his answer in question time on 4 June concerning the Bennelong car dealer?

Mr RUDD—As the Leader of the Opposition stands and asks any question in this place, I would ask the entire nation to reflect on what credibility can be attached to this Leader of the Opposition, a Leader of the Opposition who has refused to answer with any basic element of credibility. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that the only responsible thing for him to do in this parliament today is to resign.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a very straightforward question. This is not an opportunity for the Prime Minister to engage in another tirade of abuse.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The parliamentary secretary and the member for Fadden will get an opportunity to have a discussion outside the chamber. I indicate to the chamber that, even though it is only three or four minutes past the hour, there appears to be an opportunity for me to give an early general warning—which I have not given yet, but I will have it under consideration. Both sides of the chamber, if they really think that these issues are important, will sit in silence.

Mr RUDD—It is interesting that in this first question time today, following the extraordinary events of yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition would immediately seek to try and change tack. The Leader of the Opposition’s entire attack against the credibility of this government has rested on a forged and faked email, a fraudulent document. Therefore, in a desperate attempt, the Leader of the Opposition has sought today to broaden the agenda, to broaden the attack, out to anything else other than the matters for which he has yet to account fully to this House. The matters on which he has failed to fully account to this House are: firstly, what were his and the opposition’s full dealings in relation to this faked and forged email; secondly, what were the opposition’s full dealings—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It was a short, specific question and it should have an equally short and specific answer. Does he stand by his answer on 4 June?

The SPEAKER—To the point of order by the member for Warringah: as I have indicated before, my concern is not about the shortness of the answer; it is about the relevance of the answer. The Prime Minister will relate his material in response to the question.

Mr RUDD—The second question which the Leader of the Opposition needs to answer in this place is as follows: that is, the Leader of the Opposition’s dealings on this matter in relation to the public servant in question.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The point of order is on relevance. The question could not be more specific—
The Speaker—The Prime Minister will respond to the question and relate his material to the question.

Mr Rudd—Once again, the Leader of the Opposition fails to answer these most basic questions: what were his full dealings on the matter of this email and what were his full dealings with the public servant in question? Rather than engage again in the politics of smear, let us have some real evidence here. As I said on the day in question—

Dr Stone—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister is defying the chair. You asked him to be relevant. He is refusing your—

The Speaker—The Prime Minister will respond to the question and relate his material to the question.

Mr Rudd—Therefore, in response to the matters which have been canvassed in this House, both today and on other days, I would say that the Leader of the Opposition actually needs to not engage in the continued politics of negative smear but to actually ask substantive questions.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—They howl and protest as they seek to take the spotlight off themselves. As I said on the day in question, the representations I can recall in relation to that matter were from a car dealer in the electorate of Bennelong—I remember turning around and pointing to the honourable member for Bennelong. That was the one I can recall; they are the representations that were made by me in that respect. That is consistent with the remarks I made on that day.

Economy

Mr Sidebottom (2.07 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on developments in global markets and Australia’s decisive response to the global recession?

Mr Rudd—I thank the honourable member for Braddon for his question because it goes to those matters which all working families in Australia and the entire community want to see the nation’s parliament deal with—that is, how are we supporting jobs in the midst of the worst recession that the world has seen in three-quarters of a century; what are we doing to build up our schools, our social housing and the key infrastructure of the nation in order to make a difference? We are not out of the woods yet. Global stock markets suffered significant falls yesterday. The S&P 500 fell 3.06 per cent—its worst day in two months—and in London the FTSE fell by 2.57 per cent. These falls underline the ongoing fragility of the global economy. The falls were caused in part by concerns that unemployment around the world is rising. In a statement yesterday the White House said that the US administration expects unemployment will reach 10 per cent within the next few months. The current unemployment rate reached a 25-year high of 9.4 per cent in May. The global stock market falls are now being attributed to the World Bank’s growth downgrade that I referred to in the parliament yesterday.

What we have sought to do as a government is to provide a range of measures out there to support the economy at this difficult time. On that account I refer to the report on the front page of today’s Financial Review which goes to the business community’s response to the business investment allowance that the government announced at the end of last year. The government’s investment allowance provides a temporary tax break of 50 per cent for small businesses and 30 per cent for larger companies to encourage new business and new business investment and to provide immediate stimulus to the economy. I am pleased to quote from the article, which says that Healthscope, a private health provider, is bringing forward $5 million worth
of spending on surgical equipment, beds and courier cars for its hospitals due to the government’s policy. Gary Kent, chief financial officer of Healthscope, said:

I think it’s a good move by the government … it’s made us focus on [investment] and commit to it …

Further, Caltex is bringing forward $9 million worth of pump supply and installation to its stations before 1 July.

Also, I had the privilege today of visiting the Trinity Christian School in Wanniassa. I looked carefully there at what the school is doing in the implementation of Building the Education Revolution. I attended that with the local member, Annette Ellis. We spoke to the local principal about how it is actually going to make a difference to that school. There is a building going up worth about $2 million—we saw some of the workmen there this morning—and, as I am advised, it will include about five new learning areas which will be wired to the new economy. On top of that they are extending the library by about a third. It is a school, I am advised, of about 1,139 kids. The Building the Education Revolution makes a difference to local schools like that right across the country. Of course, Trinity Christian School is one of about 7½ thousand primary schools across the country. All members in this House are having these construction projects built across their electorates and their communities to make a difference.

In my dealings with principals, P&Cs and P&Fs the overwhelming response is they want to see these projects done. They want to see their schools improve. They want to see that they have the best classrooms, the best libraries, the best multipurpose halls, the best science centres and the best language centres. That is what the government wants for them as well. Therefore, with the government’s overall $14.7 billion Building the Education Revolution program, this is being rolled out. Seventy per cent of the total funding for the program is being committed to 20,159 projects across the country. To date an estimated 99.3 per cent of schools have received funding under the National School Pride Program and nearly 65 per cent of schools under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program.

These are the practical measures that we have used and deployed in order to make a difference for local communities, for local schoolchildren, but most critically also for the national economy. These are important measures. They are what the community expects of us—helping business by the measures that we put in place by way of the temporary investment allowance and helping school communities and local tradies. I spoke to some carpenters out there this morning—one bloke was a young apprentice working on a building site—and they were supportive of the sorts of projects that we are putting up around the country.

This is the positive leadership that the nation expects of a government and of political leaders in our country at a time like this. I contrast positive leadership with the avalanche of negativity from those opposite. Not only are they engaged in a negative fear campaign on debt and deficit to talk the economy down but they have now engaged in a negative smear campaign to try and bring the government down. That is what we have had from those opposite—undiluted negativity. I would say again to the Leader of the Opposition: there are basic questions which the parliament needs to have the answers to in order for him to cease being a roadblock to national recovery—blocking things in the Senate and failing to even allow a vote to occur on the CPRS. He cannot even unite his own party on the question of the passage of alcopops. Then we have of course the absolute shambles that the opposition
have been in on the question that we have been debating here in recent days. That is why the Leader of the Opposition has but one honourable course of action, and that is to stand in this parliament to apologise and to resign. As a minimum, the Leader of the Opposition must detail to the parliament all of his and the opposition’s dealings in relation to this fake and forged email. They must detail to the parliament—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance. He was asked about the global financial crisis and his answer should be about—

The SPEAKER—The member for Warringah will resume his seat. The Prime Minister will respond to the question and relate his material to the question.

Mr Rudd—Part of dealing with the challenge of ensuring that our measures are in place to deal with the global financial crisis depends on what happens in the Senate. We have complete disunity from those opposite about whether they are going to oppose or support the CPRS, and there is the disappearance of leadership on the part of the Leader of the Opposition as they voted in the Senate today, I am advised—I stand to be corrected on this—to put off a vote, that is, refusing to vote altogether. They voted not to vote. Business wants certainty. Businesses out there, as the generators of economic recovery, want the rules done, yet those opposite are saying, ‘Oh, no. Let’s not have any leadership on this question.’ There is no leadership also on the passage of a measure concerning alcopops. But leadership also means taking responsibility for your actions. Leadership means standing up and explaining the entirety of your dealings in relation to this fake email, the entirety of the dealings in relation to this individual public servant and confirming to the parliament full cooperation on the part of computer systems and the rest in terms of the investigation which the AFP have underway. It is necessary for the Leader of the Opposition, finally and formally, to do the decent thing: stand, apologise and resign.

OzCar

Mr Bruce Scott (2.14 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to representations made to the member for Flynn by Longreach Motors, a car dealership in his electorate. Did the Treasurer have a personal phone conversation with that dealer? Did the Treasurer receive updates about that dealer’s progress on his home fax?

Mr Swan—Here we go. The smear campaign is now coming from cockies corner. The smear campaign continues. The credibility of those on that side of the House is completely shot. The obligation is on the Leader of the Opposition to come into this House and tell us about his dealings with this fake email. The Leader of the Opposition—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Ciobo interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Has the member for Moncrieff settled down so that the member for Warringah can get the call? The member for Warringah.

Mr Abbott—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker, going to relevance. I know that ministers are allowed a little introductory material but I really think there is enough now and under relevancy he should come back to the specifics of the question asked.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will relate his material to responding to the question.

Mr Swan—I certainly will, Mr Speaker, because at the core of the discussion about how car dealers were treated and who dealt with them has been the claim by the Leader of the Opposition based on a fake email. He is now so desperate that he is now trying to say that I am responsible for the fake email.
that he peddled around the country. I could not believe it on AM this morning. It was unbelievable. He has lost the plot.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance. I would simply ask the Treasurer to answer the question and to be relevant to the question. It is a very specific question: did he phone a dealer other than—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will respond to the question.

Mr Swan—Yes, I am delighted to respond to the question. The shadow Treasurer said, ‘Did he find a car dealer?’ I found many car dealers. In fact I released some correspondence overnight that shows that other car dealers were receiving as much, if not more, attention from the Treasury than Mr Grant. There were many car dealers receiving attention from the Treasury. That is the case. Built around this is a farrago of lies from those opposite about how these cases were being handled.

One of the ones that is put around is that Mr Grant had personal updates sent to the Treasurer’s fax. I just want to go through that one again, Mr Speaker, because there were something like 130 emails sent to my office by Mr Grech—130 emails—and almost 30 per cent of those emails from Mr Grech to my office contained documents specifically for my attention. One of those did go to my home fax. Why? Because I happened to be at home. That is a remarkable thing to happen, isn’t it, Mr Speaker? This year the office has sent 209 faxes to my home via email, a total of 1,487 pages, and since I have become Treasurer, 4,638 pages have been sent to my home fax. So let’s just dispense with that.

Of course there is also the notion that there is some conspiracy because some of the emails were copied to the Secretary of the Treasury. Mr Grech sent 131 emails to my office. Dr Henry was copied in to 82 of those emails. The next suggestion that we hear from those opposite is that Mr Grant received personal referrals to finance companies and that somehow he was the only person who received a personal referral to finance companies. I was talking to the MTAA only this morning and they were talking about the fact that many of their members—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer has the call.

Mr Swan—The fact is that Treasury officials were constantly putting car dealers in touch with car finance companies—

Mr Hockey—No, you, you!

The SPEAKER—Order, the member for North Sydney!

Mr Swan—and that is what was going on at the time. You can see that from the evidence from the head of Ford Credit at the Senate inquiry last Friday:

Senator ABETZ—During those meetings, was the plight of any particular car dealer mentioned to you?

Mr Cohen—Yes.

Senator ABETZ—And how many?

Mr Cohen—There are at least three or four that I can recall.

And there would have been many more but I would not know of them because these were matters that were handled by the Treasury officials with the finance companies and with the car dealers. I simply would not know.

The next allegation is that Mr Grant was looked after as a condition of rolling Ford Credit into OzCar. This is one of the biggest furphies of them all. Sloppy Joe over there has been trying to maintain that somehow Ford Credit was going to be a beneficiary of $500 million direct from the federal Treasury. Of course that was not the case at all.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Did the Treasurer have a per-
sonal phone conversation with Longreach Motors? Did the Treasurer receive updates—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The Treasurer will relate his answer in response to the question.

Mr SWAN—I am talking about the allegations that the shadow Treasurer has been making about Ford Credit and how it relates to all of the dealerships that were dealt with by the Treasury.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will respond to the question.

Mr SWAN—It is a very pertinent question because it is very clear they could not care less what happened to car dealers right across the country during this period. The thing that OzCar was to do was to raise funds from the sale of securities to the major banks to provide liquidity for the financiers. The role the government was going to play in all of that was to offer a guarantee. But Sloppy Joe over there has been out there peddling his line—

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

Mr SWAN—that somehow Ford Credit were up for a loan of $500 million, which of course they were not.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will commence to sum up.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SWAN—I am sure you do.

Mr Bruce Scott interjecting—

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

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! This chamber spent five hours on a topic yesterday. There is a lot of emotion in the chamber but there is an expectation that members will rise above that emotion. That is to both sides, because, as I said yesterday, this is not a debate that will be won by those that can shout the loudest. The Treasurer has the call and the Treasurer will commence to sum up his answer.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for O’Connor is not assisting.

Mr SWAN—Many dealers were contacting members of parliament, many dealers were contacting their trade organisation, many dealers were contacting the Treasury directly, and many of those were being put in contact with car finance companies.

In the House yesterday, I said I would follow up, through the Treasury, matters that were raised with me by two members of this House. I take those matters very seriously. I will take this matter seriously as well. I raised the two matters that were raised with me by members in this House yesterday with the Secretary to the Treasury today. He is looking at those matters and he will come back to me.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.24 pm)—Before giving the call to the member for Lindsay, I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from the Republic of the Philippines, led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon. Prospero Nograles. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Electronic Security

Mr BRADBURY (2.25 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Will the minister outline the im-
portance of maintaining integrity in e-communication and what lessons can be learned from National E-security Awareness Week?

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I accept that the question is in order but I am confident that the answer will not be. Mr Speaker, I would seek your assistance in terms of maintaining the order of the House in holding the minister strictly to matters—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Warringah will resume his seat. As acknowledged by the member for Warringah, to the point that we are at at this stage the question was in order. The minister for infrastructure has the call.

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Lindsay for his question. The member for Lindsay knows how important integrity in written material is because he was the victim of a fake pamphlet prior to the last election. In the modern age, the integrity of emails is just as important. That is why the Rudd government has marked National E-security Awareness Week. It began, very interestingly, just two weeks ago—two weeks ago, the day after the first question, based upon a fake email, was raised by those opposite, it was National E-Security Awareness Week.

Honourable members interjecting—

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

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister accused members on this side of the House of faking an email. He must withdraw that false accusation.

The SPEAKER—in the context of what is going on, I have indicated that I will listen very closely to the minister.

Mr ALBANESE—National E-security Awareness Week has some key lessons. As part of the material, its lessons for all computer users include:

When dealing with email it is important to not just blindly follow attachments from unknown sources.

That was part of the lessons that were out there in the National E-security Awareness Week promotional material for the general public. It also said:

It is important to take a bit of care in trusting where the information came from.
That is what the National E-security Awareness Week material said, just two weeks ago. Indeed, we launched an education module aimed at year 3 and year 9 students. There is no doubt that in the future it can be played in some of the new classrooms that we are building. We also produced a series of postcards. I commend to members of the House the website: www.staysmartonline.gov.au. The postcards say:

What have you lost?
Maybe the leadership! They also say:
Protect yourself online.

We even have the program ‘Budd:e’. I table it for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, who may need one or two in coming days. Clearly, the opposition did not pay attention during National E-security Awareness Week, because what we have seen from the opposition is their reliance upon a fake email to call for the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. The sorts of lessons that are being taught to kids in year 3 have not been learnt by those opposite, who are the alternative government of the nation.

The contradictions, when it comes to the connections with Mr Grech and this email, are quite extraordinary. At 7.55 am today, the shadow Treasurer, when asked about the correspondence with Mr Grech over the last few months, said, ‘Not to my knowledge.’ At 8.05 am the Leader of the Opposition was asked on AM:

Has anyone in the Opposition, to your knowledge, spoken to Mr Grech in the last few months apart from that conversation Joe Hockey said he had?

The answer was:
Well, I’m sure they have. I mean Mr Grech is very well known and I have certainly spoken to Mr Grech.

Mr ALBANESE—At 8.30 am the shadow Treasurer was out there saying, ‘Of course they have spoken to him,’ which was a remarkable turnaround. The concern that was there about this fake email that was so significant—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure you can anticipate it; it is on relevance. He has gone miles away from the subject.

The SPEAKER—The minister will respond to the question and relate to the matters of e-commerce and e-security.

Mr ALBANESE—There is a very clear lesson to be learnt from National E-security Week and that is about the integrity of emails. Another lesson is that you cannot delete them from your computers. There are other lessons there as well. The members of the opposition might bear that in mind and cooperate with the AFP investigation and make available the opposition’s computers to that AFP investigation. It is very clear from the questions they have asked today that there is one other lesson they have not learnt, which is: when you are in a hole, stop digging.

Mr Hale interjecting—

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

The member for Solomon then left the chamber.

OzCar

Mr RAMSEY (2.36 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to his statement in the House on 4 June when he said that Mr John Grant was treated ‘just like everybody else’.

Dr Kelly interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support will leave the
The member for Eden-Monaro then left the chamber.

Mr RAMSEY—When I referred a dealer to the Treasurer’s office for assistance, did he have a phone conversation with the dealer before referring them to the Treasury? Did the Treasurer also receive updates on this case to his home fax?

Mr SWAN—The first thing I will say to the member for Grey is that not every dealer sought a conversation. But I do know one thing: those dealers that contacted my office were dealt with promptly and appropriately—

Mr Pearce—By you?

Mr SWAN—Of course they were not all dealt with by me you moron.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will withdraw.

Mr SWAN—I withdraw, Mr Speaker. Anybody who knows me and my political life knows that I have always endeavoured to deal as directly with constituents—

Mr Irons interjecting—

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.

Mr SWAN—I have always sought as a member of parliament and as a minister to deal as directly as I possibly can with people who have problems, and in this case there were lots of car dealers with some very big financial headaches and the employment of thousands of Australians was on the line. So, many, many people were calling my ministerial office, many people were calling the Treasury directly and many people were going through their industry organisation, and all of these things were being handled in the Treasury. As regards those that contacted my office, they were all forwarded on to the Treasury to be dealt with as quickly and as effectively as was possible. Certainly, many were. It is also the case that some dealerships may not have fitted the criteria for assistance that could have been provided either through OzCar or by existing finance companies. I am more than happy to follow up the details that the member for Grey has asked about, but the one thing that I can say is that the government and I, through all of these times, were motivated by one central factor, and that was to support the industry at a time of global financial crisis that was threatening jobs and threatening the supply chain right through to the auto manufacturers.

This was a very serious situation. Many people thought that they were indeed probably going to lose their finance by March. That is what it was like in February and, as I indicated to the House the other day, the Prime Minister and other ministers and I spent a lot of time on this issue through that period—day after day working with the Treasury; day after day making sure that we could get OzCar up and running, knowing through all of the period while OzCar was not up and running the only option available to the Treasury, which was in receipt of the information about those financiers who were staying in the market and those dealers who might be without finance, was to work with them all. There were updates coming through to me through that period. Some did go to my home fax. Many went to my email tray in the office. It just depended on where I was. But, in relation to the ones that went to my home fax from Mr Grech, they simply went there because he hit ‘reply all’ to a communication from my office. That is why they ended up there. I never asked for them to be sent there—in the first instance—by Mr Grech because my office was using my home
fax to put a lot of material through. I do not apologise for one minute for having sensitive material sent to my home fax, because during this period we were working right around the clock, not only on this issue but on many other issues. I do recall that, as we were doing this, we were opposed every inch of the way by those opposite. So not every car dealer sought a conversation, but I certainly hope that every car dealer that went through my office got the treatment they should have received through the Treasury.

**OzCar**

Ms BIRD (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation and Minister representing the Special Minister of State. Will the minister advise the House of allegations regarding misuse of public resources? What steps should be taken with respect to the investigation of these allegations?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Cunningham for her question. Misuse of public resources is of course a serious matter. With respect to investigation of any allegations of misuse of public resources, anybody who has any knowledge or any involvement or any connection with such alleged misuse has an obligation to make information available to investigating authorities to help clear up the matter.

I would remind members of an investigation that is currently occurring with respect to an email, which has now been determined to be a fake email, that was, according to the Australian Federal Police, created on a Treasury computer and emailed from Treasury to the computer at the home of Mr Grech. Although it was subsequently deleted from the Treasury computer, the AFP was able to determine the origins of the email. In response to these extraordinary events, the government has been quite prepared to make available all of its computer records with respect to the inquiries that are proceeding—by both the Auditor-General and the Australian Federal Police—in order to ensure that they can complete their investigations and that they can get all of the available information that they can in order to determine whether any offences have been committed and, if so, by whom. Unfortunately, the opposition thus far have not agreed to make available their email and computer records to the inquiry by the Australian Federal Police in order to assist in the investigation of these matters in order to determine the origins of the email and any parties involved in its dissemination or in any way connected to the email and its dissemination more broadly.

If you—

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I am interrupting ‘Superintendent Tanner’ to state that the fact of the matter is that we have promised full cooperation with the Federal Police. We expect the investigation to be done by the Federal Police, not by the—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. That is not a point of order.

Mr TANNER—I am not quite sure—

The SPEAKER—The minister for finance will resume his seat. I call the member for Warringah on a point of order.

Mr TANNER—All I have said is ‘I am not quite sure’. Does that qualify for anything in particular?

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, the clear implication from this answer is that the opposition is not cooperating with the AFP. We will fully cooperate.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Warringah will resume his seat. The minister for finance has the call.

Mr TANNER—I am not exactly sure what the opposition leader means by ‘full cooperation’ but if he has just made an un-
dertaking to make all the opposition’s computer records available for examination by the Australian Federal Police—

Ms Bird interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister for finance will resume his seat. I could give the member for Cunningham the opportunity to listen to the answer to her question outside.

Mrs Moylan—Mr Speaker, I draw your attention again to section 100 of the standing and sessional orders. It makes it very clear, at subsection (d), that questions must not contain any inferences or imputations. Mr Speaker, I put it to you that the answer to this question is making both inferences and imputations.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Pearce—

Mrs Moylan—Mr Speaker, if I may have your attention just for a moment, because it says in (c):

For questions regarding persons:
(i) questions must not reflect on or be critical of the character or conduct of a Member, a Senator …

There are other forms of this House to deal with that.

The SPEAKER—The member for Pearce will resume her seat.

An opposition member—Well done.

The SPEAKER—There are degrees of ‘Well done’. The member has quoted the standing orders that apply to the question and the question was in order. In fact, it was very cleverly crafted.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—No, it was absolutely in order. I might add, having indicated to the chamber that I will listen carefully to the answers, whilst I appreciate that some might not appreciate the robustness of the answer, the answer has not gone into territory which should cause concern under the standing orders.

Mr TANNER—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I will not further speculate on what the Leader of the Opposition means by full cooperation, but I would in conclusion draw your attention to a few statements that have been made today by the Leader of the Opposition and by the shadow Treasurer, the member for North Sydney. I note, for example, that when he was asked on Sunrise today whether he had ever seen the fake email the Leader of the Opposition said that he was ‘not going to compromise the police investigation by answering that question’. I note also that there has been some confusion between the Leader of the Opposition and the member for North Sydney with respect to contacts that may have occurred between them and Mr Grech prior to the Senate hearing on Friday, which is when this matter first appeared in the public domain. I note, for example, that the shadow Treasurer stated on the doors, ‘I’d imagine people in the opposition did have contact with Treasury officials,’ in response to the question, ‘Did you or anybody in the Liberal Party have contact with Mr Grech prior to his testimony?’ Then the shadow Treasurer said: ‘I would expect that this is the case. I don’t want to compromise police investigations at all.’ In other words, far from providing full cooperation, they are now using the existence of police investigations as an excuse to maintain a smokescreen and to refuse to answer questions about their knowledge of these matters. On Sunrise, the shadow Treasurer, the member for North Sydney, when asked what his knowledge of the email was, said:

There’s been talk about it around the place for ages. I heard it around the place.

The SPEAKER—Has the minister for finance concluded?
Mr TANNER—No, I have not, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—In that case, I call the member for Warringah on a point of order.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, under standing order 89 members are not supposed to use offensive words, and it is offensive to be accused of failing to cooperate with an AFP investigation. We will fully cooperate with the investigation, and I ask that the minister refrain from making these offensive—

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

Mr TANNER—Thank you, Mr Speaker. The fact remains that this email was first read into the public record by a frontbencher of the Liberal Party, Senator Abetz, and there has been a variety of media reports indicating that it had been hawked around the gallery prior to its first being put into the public domain. We have now got a variety of admissions—in some cases, contrasting admissions—from different leading figures in the opposition about their involvement here. Full cooperation should mean full cooperation and participation in full by delivering all computer records to the AFP. I note—

The SPEAKER—The minister will commence summing up the answer.

Mr Albanese—Nineteen.

Mr Hayes—Nineteen.

The SPEAKER—I simply say to the member for Werriwa that that perhaps is why you are a tallier—you can count! Really, under a general warning, you are very lucky.

Mrs Moylan—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I appreciated your instruction in relation to standing order 100 but I would draw your attention to standing order 90—’Reflections on Members’. I think that the way this question is being answered is an imputation and an improper reflection on members, in particular the Leader of the Opposition. I would ask that you rule this out of order.

The SPEAKER—Order! I think that, inter alia, I have ruled on this matter to the member for Warringah. There was nothing said after that caused me to change my mind. As I have indicated before, sometimes there are things said in this place, because of its robust nature, that cause concern for people. But I have listened carefully to the minister for finance. He will respond to the question and, as I have invited him to do, he will commence to sum up his answer.

Mr TANNER—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would remind the House in conclusion that what we are dealing with here is the fallout from an accusation made in public on Friday against the Prime Minister alleging that he was corrupt and that he had lied to the Australian people. That is what we are dealing with. I will read the quotation for you again, if you would like. That is what we are dealing with. I have listened carefully to the minister for finance. He will respond to the question and, as I have invited him to do, he will commence to sum up his answer.

The SPEAKER—The minister will commence summing up the answer.

OzCar

Mr TURNBULL (2.52 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer inform the House: of the 240 car dealers the government says required support, how many did the Treasurer personally speak with on the telephone?

Mr SWAN—I have said it here; I have said it publicly: I was approached by the member for Oxley and he said, ‘Will you speak to Mr Grant?’ I did, for about two minutes, and I referred him to a DLO.
Through that period I was dealing with the problems and challenges in the industry. Many of those dealers were either contacting my office, contacting the Treasury directly or contacting the MTAA. I make no apology for talking to a small business person in an environment such as that—none at all. I do endeavour in my political life to speak to as many as I possibly can. I did speak to Mr Grant. And what I did do—and what the government—

An opposition member—Just resign.

Mr SWAN—There we go—more of the smear, right across the table. The grubby smear campaign has been laid bare.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting and the Treasurer will ignore the interjection.

Mr SWAN—The grubby smear campaign was laid bare across the table again from the Leader of the Opposition to the Prime Minister. He went out there to smear the Prime Minister and myself on a baseless email, which he had been peddling around this building for weeks. He had been peddling it around for weeks—peddling it around the business community.

Mr Hockey—I rise on a point of order. It goes to relevance. Why can’t he say, ‘Just one car dealer got a phone call from the Treasurer.’

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The Treasurer will respond to the—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—People on either front bench ought not to think that they are immune to the general warning. Whether there have been 20, 50 or 100 points of order, I indicate that I will listen to the points of order. I then have to judge and rule on the points of order. I do not need the advice of people who should be showing some leadership to the House.

Mr SWAN—I do think the Leader of the Opposition, and the opposition as a whole, have got some very serious questions to answer, because they have been involved in a grubby smear campaign against the Prime Minister and myself and particularly my family. They have been very active in the last four or five days putting around their smears against the Prime Minister and myself. What has happened in the last few days is that the basis of that smear has now emerged—there has been a fake email, which the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Turnbull—Created in your department!

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr SWAN—The fake email that the Leader of the Opposition has been using to smear the Prime Minister and the Treasurer is the fault of the Treasurer! Where does he get that logic? He has no credibility—no credibility whatsoever. All of this today is just to camouflage the very serious questions that each and every one of those front-benchers over there needs to answer. Did any member of the opposition or their staff have an electronic or hard copy of the text of the email in their possession before Friday? Did any of them? When did any member of the opposition or their staff first see the text of the fake email?

Mr Abbott—I rise on a point of order. Under the standing orders I was not aware that this was the opposition’s question time but we are happy to answer questions. We would love to make speeches at this time of the day. We really would.

The SPEAKER—If the member for Warringah wants to devote his time to putting a submission on that to the Procedure Committee that might keep him occupied, but I
would not wish him much luck in getting it up. As I have said before, these rhetorical questions have been used quite often in this place through the terms of several governments.

Mr SWAN—There are questions that need to be answered. Did any members of the opposition or their staff have any contact with Mr Grech in the last two months, or did any recently departed staff have any contact with Mr Grech in the last two months? This goes to the core of the smear campaign that has been mounted by the Leader of the Opposition.

Agriculture

Mr CHAMPION (2.57 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. What are the likely seasonal outlooks ahead, and what policy options have been supported in the past?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Wakefield for the question. Members would be aware that the latest climate projections are not good for many parts of Australia. To quote from the Bureau of Meteorology:

In addition, many computer models, including the Bureau’s POAMA, remain firm in their predictions of an El Nino event in 2009. This puts the odds of an El Nino at above 50%, which is more than double the normal risk of an event. However, it’s still possible, though increasingly less likely, that the recent trends may stall without El Nino thresholds being reached.

That weather projection carries with it a problem that we have dealt with in this parliament for many years, and that is: what to do about a shortage of water—what to do to deal with the fact that El Nino brings with it extraordinary shortages of rain, often when you need it most.

There are a number of policies of the past that the government will not be considering. While we have decided to embark on the $300 million expense of improving on-farm infrastructure, we will not be providing the $5 million payment to upgrade the irrigation at Flemington Racecourse. Nor will we be adopting the policy that was used in the past of funding the Australian Rain Corporation. It takes a significant level of self-confidence when you are faced with a drought, to say, ‘Well, I’ll just tell it to rain,’ but that’s what the rainmaker sitting opposite at the table decided to do.

Against advice that the Australian Rain Corporation ‘have provided no convincing experimental data or theoretical modelling to support the proposed mode of operation of technology,’ and despite the independent review then saying that there is ‘no convincing evidence that the ATLANT technology operates as believed by its proponents’, the Leader of the Opposition chose a different path.

I have to say I think the Leader of the House and I have been unfair to the National Party. We have not given nearly enough attention to the outrageous abuse of public money by the Liberal Party and in particular, as a former minister, by the Leader of the Opposition, because what does he do when there is no legitimate data—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This, under standing order 90, is a clear reflection on a member and a member’s conduct. It is plainly out of order and he should be instructed to conform to the standing orders.

The SPEAKER—I did not understand that in the answer there were specific allegations that were being made, but I will listen carefully and I will remind the minister of his obligation to respond to the question.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, if I could assist—

The SPEAKER—On the same point of order?
Mr Abbott—The same point of order.

The SPEAKER—I have actually ruled and I have given the call back to the minister.

Mr BURKE—This goes to one of the options for how to deal with the upcoming seasonal conditions and policy paths that have been used in the past, which is precisely what I was asked to refer to. If it is something that causes a deal of embarrassment to the Leader of the Opposition now, it is something that he was proud of in the lead-up to the election. What does he do when there is no legitimate data, no legitimate evidence? The same thing that he did when there was no legitimate email—there is no sense of caution; impatience takes over and he just presses the accelerator.

The department recommended that at most there should be a $2 million trial. So what did he provide in response to a recommendation for a $2 million trial? Ten million dollars—on the very same day the election was called, and he writes to the former Prime Minister seeking the money. And who did he do it for? One of his neighbours who was an executive of the Australian Rain Corporation, the same neighbour who was a member of the election fundraising committee known as the Wentworth Forum, with membership set at $5,000 just to get into the room. Every time you hear the confected outrage—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Under the standing orders generally, grubby smears are not to be encouraged, and this is precisely what we are seeing from this minister.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Warringah will resume his seat. The member for Calare will withdraw.

Mr John Cobb—I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—He should consider himself very lucky—at least one of his colleagues on his side went for something much more minor.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate that the minister has sat down, but he made an accusation of corruption against a member on this side of the House. It is clearly in breach of standing order 90, and we respectfully request that this accusation be withdrawn. It would assist the conduct of the House if this minister was to withdraw.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Warringah will resume his seat. When carefully listening on the first flow-through at the end, because I was trying to bring the minister to a conclusion, I did not think that he had offended, but it would assist the House if he withdrew just to clarify that point. Again, I do not want to make a critique on his answer. He was making a point by quoting back and
then quoting, but I think that, if he withdrew, it would help.

Mr Burke—I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—I thank the minister. The member for North Sydney might resume his seat—just giving a big build-up for you.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (3.05 pm)—It has been brought to my attention that we have in the gallery this afternoon a delegation from the Australian Golf Industry Council, including Dawn Fraser, who I think needs no further introduction. We acknowledge the delegation but in particular Dawn Fraser.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

OzCar

Mr HOCKEY (3.05 pm)—Thank you for the build-up, Mr Speaker. My question is to the Treasurer. Now that the Treasurer has conceded finally that, of the 240 car dealers the government says required support, just one car dealer had a phone call from the Treasurer, how many had updates of their cases faxed or emailed to the Treasurer’s home?

Mr SWAN—Here we go again with this fantastic exaggeration and smear. The fact is that my office did receive updates—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

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

Mr SWAN—and they were regular, they were when I was in the office and they went into my in-tray. That is where they go. When I am home, they may go to my home fax. I do not know what the work ethic of the shadow Treasurer was when he was a minister, but, going by the laughter we heard yesterday when it was suggested that sending a fax to my home at 5.15 was some extreme event, I think that we can take it that they did not work weekends. I think we can take that. But this government does work hard and things are sent to the home fax.

I went through the fact before that Mr Grech sent some faxes to my home fax which were not invited because he hit ‘reply all’. The opposition seek to distort that fact. In fact, my departmental liaison officer went to some lengths to say to Mr Grech not to send faxes to my home—and that is on the public record for anybody to see. But, through my office, by phone, by email and by other contact there were numerous contacts with car dealers and the industry over a long period of time—and of course not all of them are documented, like they are documented in email. Nevertheless, that was what was going on through the period.

Those opposite simply do not understand the nature of the challenge that this country is facing. They do not understand what was going on during that period and so, as a consequence, cannot conceive that there was a huge volume of activity—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question is very simple. It goes to the point: how many car dealers had their information sent to his home?

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. It is not an opportunity just to repeat the question. The Treasurer was responding to the question.

Mr SWAN—It does not matter whether it went to my home or whether it went to the in-tray in my office or whether I met them out on the road in an electorate. There was a huge volume of email. I have detailed the nature of that email. I have detailed the 130-odd emails from Mr Grech. Only a handful of those were concerned with Mr Grant. So there must have been a lot, an enormous amount, and one or two did go to my home fax. That signifies absolutely nothing what-
soever. You see, they are so acutely embarrased by their current circumstances, having hawked a fake email around the top end of town for weeks—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SWAN—It’s my fault again? The email is the fault of the government? He has been smearing the government—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney and the Treasurer will resume their seats!

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition! The Treasurer will start to sum up his answer.

Mr SWAN—The Leader of the Opposition has yet again demonstrated to this House that he is unfit for the office he holds and he should resign.

Political Donations

Mrs IRWIN (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, the Minister representing the Special Minister of State. Will the minister outline the importance of the government’s proposed reforms to political donation laws? Are there recent examples of donations that would be affected by the proposed changes?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Fowler for her question. The government is seeking to amend the Electoral Act in a number of ways to strengthen scrutiny and probity in Australia’s electoral system. Those reforms include requiring disclosure of any donations above a $1,000 limit and banning donations to political parties by foreigners. Sadly, the Liberal and National parties have been obstructing these very important reforms to political transparency and probity in this country in the Senate, which is very unfortunate. It is very unfortunate for the integrity of our democratic process.

It is worth noting that there are recent examples of particular kinds of donations that would be affected by these changes. I draw members’ attention to an article in the Sunday Age, dated 8 February this year, headed ‘Turnbull takes cash from market ‘vulture’’ and written by Josh Gordon. I would like to quote a couple of sentences from this article:

MALCOLM Turnbull has taken a large campaign donation from an American billionaire closely linked to the predatory lending practices that triggered the subprime lending crisis—

in the United States and the global recession. It goes on:

An investigation ... revealed that Peter Briger, chairman and director of controversial “vulture company” Fortress Investment Group, contributed $US50,000—

or A$76,000—

to the Liberal campaign fund for the Opposition leader’s seat of Wentworth last year.

The article then goes on to say that a ‘vulture’ company is a company which preys on the carcass of dead or distressed companies. In fact, this particular vulture company was deemed to be so aggressive that even the Wall Street Journal attacked the company for foreclosing on families who were affected in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. An interesting addendum to this article is that a search of the register of members’ interests revealed that on 14 March 2007 the Leader of the Opposition disclosed that he owned shares in the Fortress Investment Group and that this shareholding remained until 27 July 2007. According to the article he received a donation of $76,000 from this company during 2007 at some point—which does raise the interesting possibility that he was on both sides of the transaction, although it is not clear from the indications as to whether or not that is the case.

Opposition members interjecting—
Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. On the basis of the reaction, the form of words used by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation could be taken as something that would require a substantive motion about motive. He should withdraw.

Mr Tanner—I withdraw, Mr Speaker. People who peddle the kinds of accusations that the Leader of the Opposition made against the Prime Minister on Friday, and who then claim to be the great defenders of integrity and probity in public life, should not be blocking the government’s reforms to electoral laws as the opposition are doing in the Senate. These reforms are extremely important for the probity and transparency of our political system. They are very important for ensuring that the electoral system functions in an open and genuine way in the future—

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker—

Mr Ripoll interjecting—

Mr Adams interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Oxley will excuse himself from the chamber for one hour. The member for Lyons is lucky. The member for Oxley then left the chamber.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order going to relevance. The desperate peddling of this desperate distraction really is not relevant to the question.

The SPEAKER—Order! I have been listening very carefully and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation is responding to the question.

Mr Tanner—I will conclude by drawing the attention of the House again to the glaring contradiction in the positions being taken by the opposition in their willingness to accuse the Prime Minister of corruption on the basis of a fake email, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, and at the same time their resisting the government’s attempts to improve the quality, transparency and probity of Australian politics by reforming the Electoral Act and the laws regarding disclosure of political donations and donations by foreigners. So I suggest to the opposition that they clean up their act. They should stand up here and say that they will fully cooperate with the AFP inquiry and disclose all of their computer records to the inquiry, that they will pass the Electoral Act reforms and that the Leader of the Opposition should resign.

OzCar

Mr Hockey (3.16 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to the fact that the government says 240 car dealers required support. I refer to the fact that just one car dealer received phone calls from the Treasurer. I refer to the fact that the Treasurer in his last answer said only one or two car dealers’ details were faxed to his home. Treasurer, we know John Grant was one; who was the second car dealer whose details were sent to your home?

Mr Swan—This is a continuation of the smear campaign against the Prime Minister and me because it is a fact that Mr Grant received no special assistance and received no special benefit whatsoever—zero. We took the same steps to assist him as we took to assist other car dealers and certainly in some cases the evidence indicates much more effort went into those cases. That was the situation at the time because, as I said, it was a difficult time. This is what Mr Delaney had to say the other morning:

There is $8 billion worth of car plan financing used every year. There was a prospect that 50 per cent of it had just disappeared.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I appreciate that the Treasurer is
allowed some licence but he was asked a specific question and he should answer it.

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

Mr SWAN—A number of car dealers were in distress so they were phoning—

Opposition members—No!

Mr SWAN—They weren’t? Is that the case? A number of car dealers were not in distress? You do not recognise the problem—I gather that!

Mr Hockey—Answer the question!

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney will resume his seat! I am listening carefully to the Treasurer. The Treasurer is responding to the question. In his response he must relate his material to the question.

Mr SWAN—We heard what Mr Delaney had to say about all this yesterday. He said: The treatment that Mr Grant, a member of mine, got was no different from the treatment all of my other members got on my intervention on their behalf to Mr Grech. They were all treated in the same way, and for the same good reason: there was no other way to do these things. In fact I think Mr Grant has been treated less well because he went to the Treasurer.

That is what Mr Delaney had to say. Mr Delaney was working very closely with the Treasury. Mr Delaney was working very closely with Mr Grech. Many dealers were dealing directly with the Treasury, including with Mr Grech. The documentation is out there which shows that many of those, or some of those, were receiving an enormous amount of assistance. We have heard that the head of Ford Credit had indicated that they were dealing, through the Treasury, with those who were looking for finance. So all of this is just a huge concoction. It is all part of the smear campaign that is being conducted against the Prime Minister and me. Now that the Leader of the Opposition has found himself in the position of being exposed as the architect of that smear campaign—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—Order! Has the Treasurer concluded?

Mr SWAN—No.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order going to relevance. It is a simple question: who was the second car dealer that he said—

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

Mr SWAN—What I actually said was two faxes—yet another example of the smear and the misrepresentation that those opposite have engaged in from day one over this issue because they are just so desperate. They have demonstrated in this House just how unfit for government they are. At the height of a global financial crisis they have not one single positive policy alternative for this country. All they want to do is play the politics of fear and smear because they do not have any positive alternatives for Australia. The Leader of the Opposition ought to resign.

Alcopops

Ms LIVERMORE (3.21 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Will the minister update the House on the latest developments on the alcopops initiative, and support for the measure?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. People on this side of the House will be delighted to know—in fact, all will be aware of this because of being in the chamber last night voting for it—the alcopops measure has now passed the House. Although, I am disappointed to say that it was despite the announcement that was rather gracelessly executed by the member for Dickson that the Liberal Party was going to support the measure. I think he indicated that the Leader of
the Opposition had finally had his way over the member for Dickson and the rest of the shadow cabinet. He declared that support would be provided by the Liberal Party for this measure. Actually, when it came to it, there were no Liberal members in the chamber voting for this measure. In fact, there were four members of the coalition parties here voting against the measure.

I have to admit to feeling slightly sorry—and probably not for the reasons that other people in the country might be feeling sorry—for the Leader of the Opposition, who was finally able to say that he saw the merit of our arguments for the alcopops and it was a matter worthy of supporting. He said, ‘Come on troops, we’re going to vote for it,’ and he turned around and suddenly there was nobody standing there behind him. For 12 months they have been arguing against this measure. It seems to me that the Liberal Party are fine if they are against something. But if you want them to support something, they split in all directions. We have the member for O’Connor, the member for Hume and the member for Gippsland who, after all the love that was shown to him by the distilling industry during his by-election, obviously could not bring himself to vote against the measure. They actually ran an advertising campaign for him during his by-election.

Mr Chester—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order that goes to section 90 of the standing orders. The minister is inferring that there was something improper in my motives during the Gippsland by-election campaign. There were no donations whatsoever made to my campaign, and I ask the minister to withdraw.

The SPEAKER—Unless there is some other background that I am unaware of, I did not take it as the member has construed.

Ms ROXON—There is not very much love in this House. But to suggest that there is a bit of love between the distilling industry—

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

Mr Broadbent—Mr Speaker, on the point of order, I took the same inference from the minister and she should withdraw.

The SPEAKER—I have not taken that construction. The debate on it then builds the construction. If there is a problem, the member for Gippsland has another avenue to rectify it. I call the minister.

Ms ROXON—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I understand why the member for McMillan feels left out. It is, of course, because his advertising campaign was not funded by the distillers, but the member for Gippsland had advertising right through the whole by-election paid for by the distillers.

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask you to demand that the minister withdraw the claim that a member’s vote was influenced by political donations. That is a vile accusation and she must withdraw it.

The SPEAKER—I have ruled on that matter. The next part went to other things. I call the minister.

Ms ROXON—Of course I do understand why this is sensitive for the National Party. The Leader of the National Party in the Senate, despite the announcement of the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for health, has said that he will not be voting for this measure. The Leader of the Opposition is running a rabble on the other side of the House. They have argued against this measure for 12 months. Finally, they have agreed that there is merit and that this measure should be passed and then he cannot control the people in his team. When he says, ‘It’s time for us to support this measure,’ he
has the leader in the Senate saying that he
will not; he has members scattered across
this chamber who will not follow his lead-
ship. As I said, I confess to feeling slightly
sorry for the Leader of the Opposition. When
he actually decides to support somebody,
there is nobody there standing behind him.

OzCar

Mr Turnbull (3.26 pm)—My ques-
tion is to the Prime Minister. I refer the
Prime Minister to his earlier answer where
he stood by his statement to the House on 4
June relating to the Bennelong car dealer. On
4 June, the Prime Minister said he had ‘no
idea what happened as a result of that car
dealer’s representations’. Can the Prime
Minister confirm whether in fact the case is
that he did seek and receive an update on the
matter of that Bennelong car dealer?

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, the politics of
smearing in which this Leader of the Opposi-
tion engages is quite extraordinary. My ac-
tions on this matter are entirely appropriate
and I stand by the remarks I made earlier in
the parliament on this.

Building the Education Revolution
Program

Ms Burke (3.27 pm)—My question is
to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local Govern-
ment, representing the Minister for Educa-
tion. Will the minister update the House on
the issue of contested quotes for Building the
Education Revolution projects, under the
Rudd government’s nation-building eco-
nomic stimulus plan?

Mr Albanese—I thank the honourable
member for Chisholm for her question.
Members will be aware that there has indeed
been a great deal of misinformation and mis-
reporting about the Building the Education
Revolution project, with those on the other
side making some hysterical complaints
about inflated costs for projects. I know that
the member for Paterson certainly voted
against investment in his local schools, but I
also know that he claims to have a particular
interest in Bobs Farm Public School in his
electorate. During Senate estimates, Senator
Mason raised the issue of Bobs Farm Public
School getting a quote for a new classroom
for less than $150,000 when the New South
Wales department of education quoted a
higher price. As we have come to expect,
those opposite did not check the facts. They
just went out there and made claims and did
not check the facts. Actually, it was reported
in the media without a checking of the facts
as well.

I want to help out, because I have got a
copy of the quote that the school received
right here. It is dated 30 March 2009 from
Australian Portable Buildings for $122,000
for a classroom. As a diligent person acting
for the Deputy Prime Minister in the portfo-
lio representing her in the chamber, I wanted
to make sure that I checked the facts, be-
cause we know that the Minister for Educa-
tion always checks her facts before she
makes any statements before this House. I
wanted to know what standard of facility the
member for Paterson believes that students at
Bobs Farm Public School—not named after
him, I must say—should have access to. The
quote for a portable classroom of $122,000
leaves a bit out. The quote does not include
carpet, heating and cooling, foundations or a
ceiling that meets fire safety requirements.
There is no furniture, no connection to the
sewerage system or stormwater drains or
electricity. There is no site preparation—for
example, for demolition or sloping work.

Mr Baldwin—I raise a point of order that
goes to relevance, Mr Speaker. This was ac-
tually raised by the P&C, not by me, so you
have no confidence in the P&C—

The Speaker—Order! That is not a
point of order.
Mr ALBANESE—There is more missing: it had no railing on the balcony to stop kids falling off; it had no structural or design engineering certifications; it had no fencing safety or security of the site. A terrific quote, this one, for the member for Patterson to go out there and say, ‘This alternative quote is the way to go. This is the way that we can save taxpayers’ money by going down this road.’ But if that did not raise enough questions, on the quote it finishes:

We recommend that all portable buildings be tied down.

It was a tent, not a classroom! They recommended that it be tied down. Once all necessary inclusions were taken into account the New South Wales department of education estimated that the price would increase to $357,000 more than the price that the department was quoting for a similar building.

So I say to those opposite, whether it is emails, whether it is the running down of our education infrastructure projects, whether it is the running down of our rail and road infrastructure projects or our community infrastructure projects through local government: check the facts, compare the quotes, because when you are looking at building infrastructure in our schools for our children, we simply cannot cut corners nor should we take anything for granted.

OzCar

Mr HOCKEY (3.33 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Now that the Treasurer has conceded that the only phone conversation he had with a car dealer was with John Grant, now that the Treasurer has conceded that the only home fax he received on car dealers was in relation to John Grant, will the Treasurer advise the House how many car dealers had their mobile phone numbers handed over to the chief executive of Ford Credit at a meeting in which Ford Credit was seeking more than half a billion dollars of support from this government?

Mr SWAN—To begin with, I covered these details before. I quoted the head of Ford Credit about a meeting he held with the Treasury where he said in the testimony last Friday that three or four companies to his knowledge were put in contact with the finance companies. The means by which these occurred—whether it was phone numbers, emails—I do not know, because I was not there. But I do know from talking to others that there were a large number of contacts facilitated between the Treasury and a significant number of dealers. Whether that was done by mobile phone numbers, whether it was done by email, I do not know. The reason I do not know is very simple, and it goes to the core of the exaggeration and the misrepresentation of those opposite. The exaggeration and misrepresentation of those opposite goes to this fact: it was the Treasury that was dealing with the finance companies and it was the Treasury that was dealing with the car dealers. They were handling those relationships. There was not a role that was played in there by the government.

That has been outlined at length by me—and indeed it was also outlined to some extent last Friday. Of course it can be outlined at length by organisations that were involved in those discussions and most particularly the Motor Trades Association of Australia, which was very much at the centre of putting its dealers in contact with the Treasury. So to suggest that I would have any knowledge of that at all is just indicative of how desperate those opposite have become. It is utterly desperate to say that some contact with a dealer somehow indicates some special benefit when all of the evidence indicates there was no special outcome and when these matters were dealt with entirely appropriately in the same way as other dealers were dealt
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with in the Treasury. That is what all the evidence indicates.

But they have not let go of this, because they have to continue to exaggerate; they have to continue to misrepresent. Why do they have to do that? To continue the smear based in the very first instance on a false email to make the most damning allegation that can be made against a political leader in any country in the world: that somehow he and his Treasurer are corrupt. That is what this desperate man who sits opposite did. He went out and did that, and it all turned to smoke yesterday. So what we are seeing in the House today is some attempt to misrepresent, some attempt to exaggerate, some attempt to try and retrieve some lost political ground.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, on the relevant standing order it is pretty obvious that he is now running off on their usual tangent and he should be called back to the question.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Warringah shall resume his seat. The Treasurer will relate his material to the question.

Mr SWAN—The question related to the grubby opportunism of those opposite. That is what it related to. We have an opposition leader who is in so much trouble and is so desperate he went out today and claimed I was responsible for the creation of a fake email. How desperate can you get? He has no integrity, he has absolutely no credibility and those opposite should really bury this grubby opportunist and get rid of him as soon as possible.

Climate Change

Mr RAGUSE (3.38 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister outline any obstacles to Australia playing its part in bringing down greenhouse gas emissions, but also for business certainty and the economy. That is why you have statements from Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, the Climate Institute, Pacific Hydro, the Ai Group, the Business Council of Australia, BP Australasia’s president, as well as Shell’s chairman all talking about the need for one core thing on climate change and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme—that is, certainty for the business environment. Calls for example that said, ‘We call on the Australian parliament to ensure passage of both the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and RET this year to make sure it happens, to ensure also that we have certainty for business.’

That is why the government have worked hard to have this legislation prepared for the parliament. That is why we have introduced legislation and why we are expecting this
legislation to be dealt with in the Senate. But I am advised today that what has happened in the Senate is that the opposition have reordered government business in the Senate to push the CPRS back. They have such strength of leadership that they have now resolved to vote not to vote. It goes to the absolute shambles that the opposition now find themselves in. There is an absence of leadership on something as basic as alcopops: they cannot even present themselves to vote and they are disunited on that as well. There is an absolute lack of unity on the question of climate change and the CPRS and the RET. They cannot unite themselves even to bring on a vote, for the simple reason that they fear they will split right down the middle. There is an absence of leadership also in the handling of the matter which is before the parliament now. That matter before the parliament now goes to this email scandal.

We have had I believe a debate in this place in recent days about honesty in public life. This is an important debate. It goes to the integrity of leadership. It is one which the entire parliament should be seized with and engaged in. It is basic to all of our engagements in public life. Mr Speaker, I would have thought—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Mr Speaker, plainly until now the Prime Minister’s answer has been relevant, but we all know what he is about to say and he should not be allowed to.

The SPEAKER—So far it is relating to the last phrase in the question.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, it might be challenging to some of those opposite, but the question actually went to the importance of honesty in national political life and national leadership. I would draw the acting manager of opposition business’s attention to the actual text of the question. In terms of the honesty which is at stake in this debate on this fake email affair, I draw the House’s attention to some of the things which have been said in pursuit of honesty in this House today by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition today has said he has never accused—he said it in public today, he may have said it in the House as well—myself or the Treasurer of corruption. Mr Speaker, let me read to you what he said in his press conference on 19 June. He said: The Prime Minister and the Treasurer have used their offices and taxpayers’ resources to seek advantage for one of their mates and then lied about it to the Parliament.

Mr Speaker, what form of language and interpretation can be used in relation to a statement like that, other than to say that it is an accusation of corruption? Any fair-minded person would reach that conclusion.

Can I also say that on the question of the handling of this matter since the events of yesterday, again on the question of honesty, those opposite sought in recent times to say that Senator Abetz in the Senate only raised the question of the contents of this fake email after it appeared in the Daily Telegraph. Yesterday those opposite could not even get their stories straight. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—who intently avoids my gaze—said that in fact the only reason Senator Abetz raised this—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, what a tangled web they weave. Both the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that Senator Abetz raised this matter in the Senate because it was in the Daily Telegraph. They made those statements about Senator Abetz’ testimony to the Senate, or his presentation to the Senate on Friday. These matters did not appear in the
Telegraph until Saturday. On the question of honesty in public life, I would suggest that those opposite might reflect on that as well.

Then, of course, we had this extraordinary concoction in the papers yesterday, with the Leader of the Opposition again using his journalist of choice from the Australian, Mr Milne, to reflect and to provide a briefing concerning the accuracy of the recorded conversation involving Dr Charlton. The core of it is this: the Leader of the Opposition in that briefing said as follows: he did not approach Dr Charlton; Dr Charlton approached him. Yet we had Malcolm Farr in the Daily Telegraph providing a simultaneous account of what occurred before adding, ‘The Leader of the Opposition was seeking out Dr Charlton and approached him.’ Again, what a tangled web those opposite weave on the question of honesty.

Can I say also that the most extraordinary thing that I have seen so far in this debate is the accusation today that this entire false, fake, forged email affair is somehow the fault of the government. The silence on the part of those opposite sitting behind the Leader of the Opposition says it all—the stunned silence of his backbench. For this Leader of the Opposition to have mounted a campaign against my integrity and that of the Treasurer over recent times on the basis of a forged, fake, false email and then, when it is found out, to turn around and say that he has no responsibility for this but that it is the fault and responsibility of the government says how detached from reality he has become.

I say to the honourable member for Bradfield and, in his absence, the member for Higgins—the senior statesmen of the Liberal Party: tap this man on the shoulder. He must resign. Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister for Health and Ageing has the call! Regrettably, I am unable to pre-empt the matter that the Minister for Health and Ageing wishes to place on record on indulgence, but I think that the chamber might like to listen quietly.

SWINE INFLUENZA

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (3.47 pm)—On indulgence, I have the sad responsibility to report to the House that another person with H1N1 influenza has died. Since we have been in the chamber today, the Victorian government has made an announcement that a 35-year-old man from Colac in western Victoria, who was suffering from a number of other significant underlying medical conditions, was admitted to Maroondah Hospital on 19 June and died on 20 June. He is believed to have died from respiratory failure. However, because of his clinical history, samples were taken and the Victorian government was advised by the laboratory that he had tested positive to H1N1 influenza. Of course, the Australian government and, I am sure, the Australian parliament would like to pass on its condolences to the man’s family.

This is the second death in Australia of patients who have swine flu. It is a reminder that the flu can have severe outcomes for some people with existing conditions. I would like to take the opportunity to remind the public that those conditions include morbid obesity, cardiovascular, renal and respiratory diseases, asthma and pregnancy. However, I would also like to take the opportunity to remind people that, for the vast majority, this infection remains mild and most people will make a rapid and full recovery with no medical intervention.

We will continue to focus our efforts, as will state and territory governments, on identifying and treating early those people who are most likely to suffer severe conse-
quences. I urge the community to continue to follow sensible protocols if they are suffering from the flu, particularly if their family or colleagues have any of these conditions which put them particularly at risk.

Unfortunately, as this disease continues to spread through the community, it is inevitable that we will experience more cases with severe outcomes, potentially also resulting in death. I thought it was important that the House be brought up to date with those recent developments.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (3.50 pm)—On indulgence, on behalf of the coalition, I would like to extend to the family of the deceased man from Victoria our deepest sympathies. This is a serious situation, obviously, and, like the Minister for Health and Ageing, I call on all Australians to heed the medical advice provided to them by their doctor or any other person they seek medical advice from at an emergency department and to listen to the public health warnings. The coalition has sought and received a number of briefings from the Chief Medical Officer and will continue to do so and to support the government where appropriate—to ask the appropriate questions but to be kept briefed on this developing situation at all times.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (3.51 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes, Mr Speaker, I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Last week, the Australian wrote that I spoke to the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, lobbying her to cancel her planned overseas travel. That is not the case and, if the journalist, Patricia Karvelas, had bothered to phone me or my office, she might have got her facts right. It always pays for journalists to check their facts.

The SPEAKER—I apologise to the member for Gippsland, who is seeking the call. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government is seeking to add to an answer given during question time.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Electronic Security

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (3.51 pm)—Mr Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the chair to add to an answer.

The SPEAKER—The minister may proceed.

Mr ALBANESE—for the purposes of clarity, I provided to the Leader of the Opposition a copy of the Hansard because there was some concern with my answer in response to a question. Having read it, he is certainly satisfied. I said:

… interestingly, Mr Speaker, just two weeks ago, two weeks ago, the day after the first question was raised, based upon a fake email, by those opposite, it was National E-Security Awareness Week.

It was quite clear that I was saying—and the Leader of the Opposition has accepted this—that it is a fake email and it was raised by those opposite. For clarity, there was no other intent.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (3.52 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?
Mr CHESTER—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr CHESTER—The Minister for Health and Ageing, in her answer today, inferred an improper motive on my decision to cast my vote on the so-called alcopops legislation. I will carefully check the Hansard but the inference that I took was that my vote had been unduly influenced by the alcohol industry’s support during the Gippsland by-election, and I invite the minister to actually substantiate that allegation. The distillers ran their own advertising and did not mention my name or any other candidate and I had no involvement in the advertising, and I am not aware of any donation to my campaign by the alcohol industry. I do take offence to the imputation that my vote can be bought, and it is a great discredit to the minister that she has sought to typecast me in this manner.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions in Writing

Dr STONE (3.53 pm)—Mr Speaker, under standing order 105(b), I rise to inform you that my question in writing No. 431, dated 27 November 2008, which is seven months ago, to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has not been answered. As this exceeds the 60-day limit for response I ask that you write to the minister and request that the answer be provided immediately.

The SPEAKER—Under standing order 105(b), I indicate to the member for Murray that I will take appropriate action, and I apologise that I did not seek questions to me before the personal explanations as I am required.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Reports Nos 43 and 44 of 2008-09

The SPEAKER (3.54 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit reports for 2008-09 entitled Audit report No. 43, Performance audit: construction of the Christmas Island immigration detention centre: Department of Finance and Deregulation, and Audit report No. 44, Performance audit: security risk management.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.54 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.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Local Sporting Champions

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport) (3.54 pm)—I am pleased to highlight today that the government has delivered on its election commitment to support Australian junior athletes through the implementation of the Local Sporting Champions program. And in highlighting this important commitment, I would also like to take the opportunity to update the House on the progress of the program, which as its name suggests, is providing real support to help our next generation of Australian sporting champions to compete and to achieve.

Under Local Sporting Champions junior sportspeople from every corner of Australia are provided with financial assistance to help them pay the costs which are associated with their competition. Every Australian parent who regularly supports their kids to participate in the sports they love knows full well that families contribute more than their time, their enthusiasm and their cheerleading skills when it comes to junior sportspeople. The ever increasing cost associated with travel, fuel costs, accommodation, uniforms and
equipment all add up—particularly for those families who do it tough.

That is why the government launched the Local Sporting Champions program last year—investing $6.4 million over four years to support thousands of junior athletes and hundreds of local junior sporting teams. The program is about helping out with the costs associated with junior sports competitions—giving a practical helping hand to up-and-coming sportspeople and their families with the added costs that sporting success can bring for young athletes and for the family budget. And, of course we recognise that these grants do not cover all of these costs but we do think that it is absolutely appropriate that the federal government provides some assistance and a helping hand along the way.

Open to every federal electorate, Local Sporting Champions provides local members with the opportunity to support young athletes within their communities to pursue and achieve their sporting dreams. Under the program eligible junior sportspeople can apply for grants of $500 for individuals and $3,000 for teams. To be eligible applicants need to be:

- aged between 12 and 18 years of age at the time of the nominated sporting competition;
- participating in an official national sporting organisation endorsed state or national sporting competition or national school sport competition; and
- required to travel greater than 250 kilometres.

But Local Sporting Champions is not only about supporting the development of pathways for our junior athletes, it is also central to the government’s belief that the benefits of sport and physical activity are critical to building a healthier nation. Active kids are healthy kids, and in helping junior athletes to compete Local Sporting Champions also helps break down the barriers that may prevent young people from participating in sport and physical activity.

I am a great believer that the health of our children is inextricably linked to community sport, and that is why we are an unapologetic partner with grassroots sport. Our commitment to community sport has also been demonstrated by the government’s recent $300 million investment in grassroots sport facilities as part of the economic stimulus package, the largest single investment in community sporting infrastructure in Australia’s history, supporting Australian jobs, supporting Australian communities and providing a boost to grassroots sport. What this all adds up to is more opportunities for young Australians to participate in sport, activity and to extend their skills through competition.

And on that note I am very pleased to inform the House today that through the Local Sporting Champions initiative, the government has supported a total of 847 individual junior sportspeople and 61 teams under just the first two rounds of this fantastic initiative. There are literally hundreds of stories from right across Australia where young Australian sportsmen and women have benefited from the Local Sporting Champions program and I wish to provide the House with just a few examples today.

From the electorate of Braddon an individual grant of $500 was awarded to Samantha Koch, a young cross-country runner. This funding assisted Samantha with the costs associated with her travel and accommodation to compete at the Australian Cross Country Championships in Geelong, Victoria.

From the electorate of Sydney, Elliot Brown, a young triathlete, received $500 to attend the Australian Triathlon Champion-
ships in Tasmania. I am pleased to say that with this grant through the Local Sporting Champions program, Elliot not only competed at the national championships but went on to win and subsequently has been selected to represent Australia at the world championships.

Each one of these stories not only represents the success of an individual but also highlights the capacity of Local Sporting Champions to build important links between sport, local representatives and communities. And the fact that communities get the opportunity to support and to share in the journey of our junior athletes as they aspire to become the next Ian Thorpe, Adam Gilchrist or Liz Ellis is also a fantastic by-product of the program.

Helping to generate the attention and recognition that our local sporting champs deserve—acknowledging the dedication and commitment of our junior athletes and the support of their families—is what makes Local Sporting Champions so great. It is about real people and the very real commitment demonstrated by young athletes and their families.

I would like to assure the House that the government will continue to look for ways to support junior sport and to this effect I look forward to the report by the independent panel later this year, which will include a range of recommendations around strengthening the Australian sport system, including pathways from junior sport right through to elite sport.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all members from both sides of the House who have utilised this program to the full benefit for their electorates and also those members who have provided feedback on the delivery of the Local Sporting Champions, which will assist in enhancing this already successful program. I encourage all members to continue to promote this program within their electorates—to continue to support junior athletes across Australia to participate in sporting competitions around the country because it is good for local athletes and their families and will help support the next generation of Australian sporting heroes.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Boothby to speak for seven minutes.

Leave granted.

Ms KATE ELLIS—I move:

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

Question agreed to.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (4.02 pm)—The Local Sporting Champions program is one that the opposition has embraced and supported. Providing financial support to our up-and-coming sporting athletes who are required to travel long distances to compete in national sporting competitions is a worthy cause. An email I received from a successful recipient of a Local Sporting Champions grant in my electorate said:

I would just like to thank you for the local sporting champions grant. I really enjoyed competing in the National Downhill Championships in Canberra and your grant helped me greatly to get there. I came fourth in my U17 age group. I was pleased with my result, being my first national Champs.

Thanks again
Grant Womersley

It is important that governments, along with local communities, work to break down barriers that restrict participation in sporting activities. One of the main barriers to increasing participation in sporting activities is the cost. Buying sporting equipment such as uniforms and boots can be expensive, espe-
cially when a young person participates in more than one sporting activity. But for young people who are seeking to further their early careers by competing in national competitions, travel costs can be an additional burden that cannot be met. The Local Sporting Champions program seeks to alleviate this cost burden, which is why the opposition gives the government its support. In a great sporting nation such as Australia—a nation that dominates the cricket world, embraces four football codes, dominates the Commonwealth Games and matches it with the best at the summer Olympics and Paralympic Games—it should not be the case that a young athlete has to give up on their sporting goals because they cannot afford to attend national championships.

The coalition in government and in opposition has always strived to implement policies that improve participation among children and young adults. High levels of participation in community based sport are essential to maintaining a healthy, active society. Along with its obvious health benefits, it provides the opportunity for important social engagement and contact. The key to improving participation throughout a person’s life is to ensure they develop good motor skills at an early age. If a young person fails to develop good motor skills or forms a negative view of sporting activities or physical activity generally, that person is less likely to stay physically active and participate in community sport at a later age. This is why the former coalition government introduced the Active After-school Communities program, which is now providing sporting activities for 150,000 primary school students in after-school care.

The Australian Sports Commission recently stated that the Active After-school Communities program has led to increased participation in sporting club and community based sporting organisations. This program has succeeded in getting inactive kids up and moving. Almost 90 per cent of parents who responded to a survey conducted by the Australian Sports Commission said that their children were inactive prior to joining the program. The success of this program is helping address the issue of overweight and obese Australian children.

In addition, it was the former coalition government that put physical education back into primary schools, forcing state Labor governments to ensure their primary school students were provided with at least two hours of physical activity a week. I note that this Labor government has decided to remove this provision from the new funding agreement. The Minister for Education said, in response to a question on the Notice Paper:

Responsibility for physical education lies with individual jurisdictions and non-government education authorities.

Along with our support of the government’s Local Sporting Champions program, the opposition would welcome a move by the Minister for Sport to guarantee the Active After-school Communities program continues beyond 2010 and also to make sure our primary schools are offering an adequate level of physical education.

The Local Sporting Champions program is unique. It is one of only a few new sporting programs that this government has implemented since it has been in government. So far, things are either on hold or funding is just being rolled over in sport. Funding for the Australian Sports Commission has been frozen. With the international sporting arena becoming increasingly competitive as competitor countries such as Great Britain pour more resources into Olympic sports, our elite athletes are receiving nothing extra. They are being told to work with what they have.
Every time that this government is asked about what is happening in sport, the standard response of the government is that they are awaiting the results of the independent review. While the coalition supports the government’s review into sport led by David Crawford, the time it is taking to have this report completed is ridiculous. It is time that the government pulled sport off the holding pattern that it has been in since August last year and started providing some direction for sport in Australia. Even if this report is completed and the government responds to the review by the end of the year, as it now says that it will, this would mean that it has taken the Rudd government two years to come up with a sports policy. While we commend the minister on the Local Sporting Champions program, she needs to get the ball rolling in other areas, because there is still a lot more to do.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

OzCar

The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable member for North Sydney proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The failure of the Government to treat all car dealers equally in relation to the OzCar scheme

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 HOCKEY (North Sydney (4.08 pm)—I will provide no rhetoric and no great emotion—even though this is an issue that calls for some emotion—but just a clinical analysis of what is going on. On 4 June 2009, in response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition, the Treasurer said in relation to John Grant Motors:

It is the case that Mr Grant made representations to my office, and he was referred on to the SPV—the special purpose vehicle—just like everybody else.

Just like everybody else. He went on to say: I have no idea what the outcome of that was. But it is entirely normal that, in circumstances where car dealers right around this country were potentially going to the wall, car dealers would have been ringing members of parliament, including the Treasurer’s office, asking how they could make contact with this organisation in the Treasury establishing the vehicle. That is the situation—an entirely normal situation, as the Treasury officials have reported in estimates today.

So the Treasurer said in this place that the treatment of Mr Grant was an entirely normal situation and he was treated just like everybody else.

His own words in the Hansard from Monday, 22 June were, ‘We on this side of the House took the responsible decision to involve them in the special purpose vehicle that 240-odd dealerships, most located in rural and regional Australia, would not go to the wall.’ After numerous questions today and over the last few days, for the first time the Treasurer conceded that of the 240 car dealerships—of all the car dealerships, and the Treasurer has referred to ‘many’—that were seeking support from the government and that approached his office, approached their members of parliament and approached the Treasury, only one car dealer had a direct conversation with the Treasurer, and that was John Grant from John Grant Motors, who, it has been established without any dispute, donated a car to the Prime Minister. Step 1: only one dealer had the personal phone conversation with the Treasurer.

Step 2: after numerous questions today, which the Treasurer could barely bring himself to answer, it appears that only one car dealer—just one out of 240 that were interested—had details and regular updates about
their progress going directly and indisputably to the Treasurer through the Treasurer’s home facsimile.

Mr Hartsuyker—Who was it?

Mr Hockey—John Grant from John Grant Motors. Just one car dealer got a personal phone call and just one car dealer gets regular updates sent to the Treasurer’s home.

The most significant correspondence has yet to be further discussed in this place. The starting point is the correspondence from Mr Andrew Thomas directly to Wayne Swan, the Treasurer, at his home fax. It is dated 20 February 2009—a Friday night—at 7.27 pm. It went to the Treasurer’s home. It reads like this:

Treasurer, both Godwin Grech and I have spoken to John Grant this evening. Godwin will arrange for Capital Financial to contact John in the next couple of days.

In other words, over the weekend. It goes on:

Capital has been very aggressive in the market, so it is a good chance to take on John’s business. As a fallback, Godwin will also raise John’s case with Ford Credit when he sees them in Melbourne on Monday. John has not yet been in contact with either. We are confident—this is the Treasurer’s adviser talking directly to the Treasurer—we can arrange for John to be taken up by one of these two.

After John Grant had approached the Treasurer—and I assume that there was one phone call but, I tell you what, we are going to find out if there were more—John Grant’s case is taken up. The Treasurer’s DLO says that they will work over the next couple of days—over the weekend—to find finance for the Prime Minister’s benefactor. And you know what? Here they are saying that before this crucial meeting with Ford Credit that goes to the very survival of Ford Credit—access to $500 million—the Treasury official was going to raise the issue of just one car dealer: John Grant, of John Grant Motors. Thirdly, the Treasurer is informed, directly at his home on a Friday night, that at a crucial meeting with Ford Credit that goes to the very survival of Ford Credit—access to $500 million—the Treasury official was going to raise the issue of just one car dealer: John Grant, of John Grant Motors. Then there is the report facsimile in relation to just one car dealer on the night of the meeting with Ford Credit, and it is that of John Grant. In fact, in

On the Monday, there was a meeting with Ford Credit. You need to understand where Ford Credit was at, at that particular moment. Ford Credit was on the verge of complete collapse. I refer to the email from Godwin Grech to the Treasurer’s home on the Monday, at 8.23 pm. These words went directly to the Treasurer. They were not ‘reply to all’, they were actually to the Treasurer’s home—to the Treasurer. It was to the Treasurer and to Andrew Thomas, from his office:

Andrew, as promised—that is, as promised to the Treasurer’s office—I raised the case of John Grant with the CEO of Ford Credit, Greg Cohen, during my meeting with Ford Credit in Melbourne today.

I met with Ford Credit as part of the ongoing negotiations I have been having—along with Credit Suisse—to come up with a possible response to Ford Credit’s request ... that the Government arrange for Ford Credit to access up to $500 million for around 12 months to allow it to continue to run its wholesale floorplan financing business in Australia.

As you know, Ford Credit will shut down the business if they cannot secure access to capital. That was sent directly to the Treasurer. So the Treasurer—firstly—engaged in a direct conversation with just one dealer, John Grant from John Grant Motors. Secondly, the Treasurer has updates and briefings sent directly to his home for just one car dealer: John Grant, of John Grant Motors. Thirdly, the Treasurer is informed, directly at his home on a Friday night, that at a crucial meeting with Ford Credit that goes to the very survival of Ford Credit—access to $500 million—the Treasury official was going to raise the issue of just one car dealer: John Grant, of John Grant Motors. Then there is the report facsimile in relation to just one car dealer on the night of the meeting with Ford Credit, and it is that of John Grant. In fact, in
that email, no other car dealership was raised. The head of Ford Credit and others have suggested that there might have been others. But what we do know, from evidence presented to the Senate, is that there was just one car dealer who had his mobile phone number passed across to the CEO of Ford Credit in that meeting where they were on their hands and knees begging for government support. He was described to the CEO of Ford Credit as an acquaintance of the Prime Minister, from Queensland. His name: John Grant, from John Grant Motors—one car dealer. You know what? The Treasurer said in this place that this was an entirely normal situation. He said:

It is the case that Mr Grant made representations to my office and he was referred on to the SPV just like everybody else.

Did everybody else receive personal phone calls from the Treasurer? No. Did everybody else have updates of their personal circumstances faxed directly to the Treasurer’s home? No. Everybody else got the attention on a Friday night, where it was flagged. It was guaranteed by the Treasurer’s own office to the Treasurer that if Ford Credit will not do it someone else will. At a meeting on the following Monday, there was a guarantee from the departmental liaison officer to the Treasurer that ‘John will be taken care of’. And then, on the Monday, the Treasury official Godwin Grech reported back to the Treasurer at his home. More than half of the email refers to the fact that John Grant, and I quote:

… Cohen—

that is, the head of Ford Credit—
gave me an undertaking that Ford Credit will actively look at taking Grant on.

Ford Credit do not provide credit to Kia dealers. It is extraordinary, really. You are asking the Ford dealership to provide credit to a Kia motor dealer. Of course they are going to look at it. Of course they are going to break the rules of Ford Credit. Why wouldn’t they? It is the Treasurer. It is an acquaintance of the Prime Minister. It is someone who has given a car to the Prime Minister. It is someone that the Prime Minister knows from Queensland. ‘And, of course, here is his mobile phone number. Please action, Ford.’ What a surprise! How astounding that Ford would react and say: ‘Yes, we will discuss it. Of course we will contact John Grant.’ How ironic it is that Ford moved so quickly that this email update to the Treasurer’s own home, on the Monday night after the meeting, said:

John Grant called Godwin Grech earlier this afternoon (from Auckland)—to say that Ford Credit had been in contact with him after my meeting.

Well, of course! The head of Ford Credit goes straight out the door, rings the mobile phone straight away and says, obviously, ‘We will look at your case.’ The email goes on to say:

Ford Credit and Grant are to commence serious dialogue this Thursday.

So, three days later. The email continues:

Grant seemed pleased.

I bet he did. He got the Rolls Royce treatment from the Treasurer, who said that John Grant was treated ‘just like everybody else’.

That says something about this debate—that the Treasurer has not shown the courage to walk in here and defend his own actions. Instead, he has sent the kid. If there were an MPI about my integrity or, having said that, about any minister’s integrity, that minister would have the courage to come into this place and defend their reputation, but not Wayne Swan. Wayne Swan is not in the business of defending his reputation—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member will refer to members in the appropriate way.
Mr HOCKEY—The Treasurer is in the business of obfuscating. You know what, we are not going to give up on this because we know that this Treasurer has misled the Australian people about the relationship with the Prime Minister’s benefactor and mate from Queensland.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I remind members that a general warning still applies.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Minister for Human Services) (4.23 pm)—What a weak attempt from a desperate opposition. Is it any surprise that the Leader of the Opposition is not in the chamber? Just last Friday he was calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister of Australia and the Treasurer of Australia. It comes to Tuesday and he has not even turned up for the first MPI on this matter. It just shows how seriously the Leader of the Opposition has miscalculated. He has gone from calling for the resignation of the leader of this nation to being missing in action within a couple of days.

Yesterday was a remarkable day. It is not often you see the credibility of a member of this House shredded in the course of 24 hours, and that is what we saw yesterday with the Leader of the Opposition and alternative Prime Minister. His credibility was destroyed within 24 hours, such that it is no longer tenable or sustainable for him to remain in his office and he must resign.

The opposition has been a flailing around trying to salvage a skerrick of credibility over the last 24 hours out of this imbroglio that they have created for themselves. There have been some bizarre moments as they do that. Bizarre moment No. 1 came yesterday when the shadow Treasurer, the member for North Sydney, who we just heard from, laid claim to some form of vindication because the Australian Federal Police had found an email. He breathlessly rose at 12.50 pm yesterday in the House and said:

Mr Speaker, I should inform the House of a news report on the ABC Broadcasting site which is headlined, ‘Australian Federal Police descend on Grech’s house’ …

He went on to say:

The report goes on to say the ‘police are now interviewing Mr Grech about the email which appears to have been concocted inside the Treasury Department.’

Breathless, he was. He then said:

So, an email does exist, according to this report. The Prime Minister said there was no email, and yet evidence … from a Federal Police investigation suggests that an email—

does exist.

Evidence from an emerging report suggests, firstly, that an email does exist, which contradicts what the Prime Minister said on Friday night, that an extensive search of the computer systems of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet as well as the Treasury department said no email exists.

So the member for North Sydney did not seem to care it was a fake or a forgery or a fraud; he was just happy that they had found an email, as he tried desperately to seek some vindication for himself out of the events that he and his leader had created.

Bizarre moment No. 2 came last night. This has already been referred to but it is too good to let go. This is breathtaking. Last night on the 7.30 Report we saw the Leader of the Opposition in what must go down as one of the most woeful performances in the history of that fine program. It is a big call but I am prepared to make it—that that was the most woeful performance we have seen on the 7.30 Report. This is what the Leader of the Opposition said last night:

All we’ve heard, as we heard in the introduction to this program, is that it appears that if it was concocted, it was concocted in the Treasury. That’s Mr Swan’s responsibility, not mine.
Now we have heard it all: the Treasurer has been conspiring against himself! It is his responsibility that this has happened—not the Leader of the Opposition’s responsibility that he took a forgery, a fraud, a fake and based upon it a call for the resignation of the Prime Minister of Australia. That apparently is not the member for Wentworth’s responsibility; that is somehow Mr Swan’s responsibility. So desperate to distract from the fact that the Leader of the Opposition had called for the resignation of the Prime Minister, based upon a lie, that he is prepared to claim that a forgery that was allegedly concocted in the Treasury to ensnare the Prime Minister and the Treasurer is the responsibility of the Treasurer.

The Treasurer has been conspiring against himself, according to the Leader of the Opposition, but of course none of this can divert from the fact that the Leader of the Opposition is failing to adequately account for his knowledge of events leading up to yesterday.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The minister needs to be careful about the reference to lying. That is for future reference.

Mr BOWEN—To be clear, I was referring to the fake email as a lie.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I understand, but I will draw the member’s attention to it.

Mr BOWEN—I do take your point, Madam Deputy Speaker. We know that the Leader of the Opposition told Dr Charlton at the Midwinter Ball in the Great Hall that there was documentary evidence about the Prime Minister making representations to the Treasury. Unless he was referring to something else, I assume he was referring to the email we now know is a forgery. He admitted this morning on the Sunrise program—and this is also very interesting—that he knew about certain matters:

Turnbull: We did not make any accusation against the Prime Minister until after Godwin Grech had given sworn evidence in the Senate.
Koch: Did you know that was coming?
Turnbull: Well of course we had some, absolutely, we, we—
Koch: And you knew what he was going to say?
Turnbull: Well we certainly were expecting based on information we’d received from—

Koch: From who?
Turnbull: (inaudible) I’m not going to go into that he would say—
Koch: Why not?
Turnbull: that he had had a communication. Well Kochie I don’t want to go any further than that. I wouldn’t either. Then this morning it gets worse. On AM Lyndal Curtis, an award winning journalist no less, said:

LYNDAL CURTIS: … Has anyone in the Opposition, to your knowledge, spoken to Mr Grech in the last few months apart from that conversation Joe Hockey said he had?
In fairness, I do not think Joe Hockey did have a conversation. I wish to say that the member for North Sydney left a message, which is completely different. The interview continued:

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Well, I’m sure they have. I mean Mr Grech is very well known and I have certainly spoken to Mr Grech.

So said the Leader of the Opposition. So could the Leader of the Opposition do one thing before he tenders his resignation? Could he provide full disclosure of the Opposition’s knowledge about this sordid little matter?

As we all know, the opposition’s case has two parts to it, and the second leg has as little substance as the first. The first is that the Prime Minister made representations to the Treasury—Dr Charlton did it on his behalf—by sending an email. We now know that to be a complete and utter fraud. The second leg has as little substance: that the Treasurer
gave favourable treatment to Mr John Grant. That has been completely debunked over the last 24 hours. First, we saw the chief executive of the Motor Traders Association of Australia, Michael Delaney, who has been closely involved with the government in sorting out problems for car dealers—

Mr Robb—And for the Labor Party.

Mr Bowen—And yes, we just heard the opposition again doing what they did in question time by now traducing his reputation. It was not good enough to traduce the reputation of ministers of the Crown; now we traduce the reputation of a man who represents employers in this country, because he had the temerity to tell the truth. You should be ashamed of yourself. You should hang your head in shame, as should your colleagues, traducing the reputation of a man because he dared to tell the truth, because he dared to stand up and say that the government has done nothing wrong. That is what this opposition does; it is their modus operandi—when caught out, traduce; when caught out, smear; when caught out, exaggerate. The chief executive of the Motor Traders Association, an organisation which represents employers, came out and said that this case was handled no differently from any other. In fact Mr John Grant probably got a little worse treatment because he went directly to the Treasurer not to the Treasury. It was a pretty compelling statement.

Then overnight the Treasurer released a series of emails showing that a range of cases received close and personal attention from the Treasurer’s office. None of them was from Mr John Grant of John Grant Motors. I will share one example with the House, an email of 28 April, 7.01 pm. The opposition has made the claim that because emails are sent after hours somehow that shows that special attention is being given. Okay, fair enough. This is in relation to a female dealer. I do not know her name because it is blacked out, appropriately, in the email, but we can take it as read that it is a female, that it is not John Grant. The email says:

I took a call this morning from [name]. She told me that the Treasurer’s office suggested she speak to me …

So she was referred to the Treasury as Mr Grant was. It goes on to outline some details and then it says:

I and Credit Suisse spoke to the Australian head of [an unknown finance company] early this afternoon to determine what scope there was for that company to keep financing [name].

So there you have the Treasury official talking to the Australian head, the chief executive, of a finance company trying to get finance for this individual. It is exactly the same as occurred with Ford Credit and Mr John Grant. But this person, presumably, had never had the misfortune of meeting a member of the government or of knowing the Prime Minister, because, according to the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition, that would disqualify them from getting that assistance. It goes on to outline the support given by the Treasury and the Treasurer’s office to that individual. When you look through these emails it is quite clear on any objective reading that the Treasurer’s office was actively working and assisting a whole range of car dealers, and so they should, because that is the job of the Treasurer and the Treasurer’s office.

The opposition makes a case that Ken Henry, the Secretary of the Treasury, was personally copied in to the emails on Mr Grant. They said that that was inappropriate: how could the Secretary of the Treasury be singled out to be informed about one dealer? There is only one problem with that little equation: out of the 131 emails between Mr Grech and the Treasurer’s office, 82 were
copied to the Secretary of the Treasury, dealing with a range of car dealers.

As I said yesterday in the House, the Treasurer of Australia is a very good man. He is also a very good Treasurer and a very competent man. When did the opposition first raise this issue? When it became apparent that Australia had returned positive growth in the last quarter. So they had their little tactics meeting and they said: ‘Well, we had better get off the economy. We cannot attack the Treasurer’s competence and we cannot attack the Prime Minister’s competence, because they are leading Australia through the global economic crisis. We are actually now the fastest-growing developed country in the world. We have the second-lowest unemployment of any developed country in the world. So we had better not make those cases anymore because they are in tatters. I know what we will do. We will traduce the reputation of the Treasurer and the Prime Minister. We will raise questions about their integrity, because we can no longer raise questions about their competence.’

Oppositions are entitled to pursue whatever tactics they like. They are entitled to raise questions. They are entitled to raise issues. They are more than entitled, they are obliged to do that. But what they are not entitled or obliged to do is to call for the resignation of the leader of the nation based on a forgery. They are not entitled to traduce the reputations of good people whether they be government ministers or heads of employer organisations or public servants or others.

But we all know this opposition, who—so disappointed at having been thrown out of office in 2007—when under pressure, traduce the reputation of good people and public servants. They have done it to Ken Henry and Graeme Samuel; they have done it to many. Now they are doing it to the Treasurer, the Prime Minister and Mr Delaney. The opposition can make all sorts of allegations in any method they like, but the activities of the opposition over the last few days say a lot more about them and the Leader of the Opposition than they ever will about the government, the Treasurer or the Prime Minister.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (4.37 pm)—The hallmark of this government, which is 19 months old tomorrow, is already crystal clear: reward your mates and punish your enemies. There are the Labor mates, the Ipswich car dealer who parties and dines with the Prime Minister. He needs a bit of government assistance and the government is there and ready. Those people who are battling in small business right around the country, when they need assistance, there is nothing on offer. When the car dealer from Ipswich speaks to his local member, the member for Oxley, he contacts the Treasurer who immediately offers to ring up the car dealer, Mr John Grant. This is service of high quality. It is the service that you would expect, perhaps, for the Queen.

The Treasurer did not call any other car dealer, just this one who was a Labor mate and who just so happened to need some assistance. After the government released selected emails, it became all the more clear that this car dealer was singled out for special treatment. The member for Flynn made representations about Longreach Motors. Longreach Motors did not get a special call from the Treasurer. The member for Grey raised concerns about a car dealer in his electorate but that car dealer did not get a special call from the Treasurer. They often talk about the service that was provided to the member for Riverina in response to concerns about one car dealer, but that car dealer did not get a special call from the Treasurer. We heard in reply to this matter of public importance a reference, a few moments ago, to a female car dealer that the government lauds as an
example of their quality of service, but that car dealer did not get a call from the Treasurer. Only one car dealer got a call from the Treasurer.

But the red carpet treatment did not end there. Mr Swan then passed details to his senior adviser, who contacted the Treasury official with responsibility for the program in question, OzCar. The official then rang Mr Grant and reported back to a series of people in the Treasurer’s office and his own department. That information was then relayed from the Treasurer’s office to Mr Swan’s Brisbane home via fax. No other car dealer got a progress report for the Treasurer faxed to his home. The car dealer in Longreach did not get a progress report faxed to the Treasurer’s home on the weekend about what was happening in his case. The car dealers in Grey and Riverina did not get a fax to the Treasurer’s home about progress on their cases and neither did the female car dealer referred to just a few moments ago. Her case was not reported to the Treasurer by fax. The reality is that no other car dealer got such close attention and detailed reports back to the Treasurer’s home on Friday on his home fax.

And then, of course, there was a lot more than that. That was not the end of the service. When there was a discussion going on about how car dealers could be assisted, the Treasury officials chose to mention and give the phone number of this car dealer to Ford Credit. The car dealer at Longreach’s phone number was not given to Ford Credit and neither were the phone numbers of the car dealers in Grey and Riverina or the female car dealer referred to a few moments ago. None of that was provided to Ford Credit with the request that they provide some assistance. Just one car dealer was chosen for this kind of special treatment, and that car dealer was a friend of the Prime Minister, a friend of the Treasurer—a car dealer who just happened to provide a vehicle for the Prime Minister, with all expenses paid year-in-year-out to assist him in his electoral duty. This for a Prime Minister who has already got an electorate car, a chauffeur driven limousine in Canberra, access to the whole Comcar fleet and the VIP aircraft to fly him all over the country, but that was not enough.

Mr Hartsuyker—And a Mazda ute.

Mr TRUSS—He also had to have a Mazda ute to drive around in his electorate, and that came by way of a special treat from a special friend—a person who just happened to live down the street. The Treasurer is asking the parliament to believe that there was nothing unusual about all of this special attention to this car dealer—that it was nothing out of the ordinary. And yet, with all the email traffic that has been released over these days, we cannot find another example where the Treasurer has taken time out, on one of his undoubtedly very busy days, to personally contact an individual car dealer or to have the latest news in relation to his case faxed to his home or to have his case taken up by Treasury officials with Ford Credit.

I know the job of Treasurer is very demanding, and that Friday—20 February—when all of this was happening was probably fairly torrid. A quick check of the records shows that Mr Swan announced on that day the interim chief executive of the Ruddbank—another institution being set up to help the Labor mates, those involved in unit development and property development. It is a bank that is there to help people at the big end of town—there is nothing around to help small business who might have these sorts of problems. But the Treasurer was busy that day trying to set up this new Ruddbank so that there could be assistance provided to people in the big building industry. On that day also the government was providing details on its second cash splash—the big
handout. That was all happening. The proposed emissions trading scheme was on his agenda and so, as he said in parliament today, it was a busy day. But, in spite of all that, he could find time to ring up a car dealer to see how he was getting on and how his finances were going. One car dealer got this special treatment even though the Treasurer had weighty things of state on his agenda. I just wish that everybody else could get that level of service.

Treasurer officials went to an important meeting with Ford Credit knowing that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer had a special interest in this case. They gave John Grant’s phone number to Ford Credit at the same time as Ford Credit were asking for support for $500 million. I am not suggesting that the Treasurer officials were so ham-fisted that they said, ‘If you give this guy a million and a half dollars we’ll give you $500 million.’ I am not suggesting it was like that. I am sure that it was all done with very straight faces and that they talked in very great detail about the importance of the $500 million to protect all of the car dealers of the country. But on the side they would have said, ‘Here’s a phone number. We’d like you to call this guy. The fact that he isn’t a Ford dealer is beside the point. He’s a Kia dealer, but you might like to fix this guy up. Have a bit of a chat to him. Whether he is in New Zealand or wherever he might happen to be, have a bit of a talk to him.’ And this special treatment occurred for this dealer. It did not occur for the dealer at Longreach or for the female dealer we heard about just a few moments ago. It did not happen for the car dealers in Grey or in Wakefield, and yet we are asked to believe that nothing special happened.

I just wish that all ministers were that prompt in responding to issues. I have been waiting for months for replies to letters that I have written to ministers. In fact, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has not replied to a single letter I have written to him since he was appointed minister. That is the normal standard of government response to correspondence, or it is a frequently used standard of response. But here we have a Treasurer, busy at home on a weekend, who can find time to phone up for one of his mates. The reality is that we do not get that kind of treatment when it comes to looking after ordinary Australians. We do not get that kind of treatment when it comes to looking after small business men who are battling. What we have here is something that has clearly happened to support one key person—a person who is a known friend of the Prime Minister, a dining partner who lives up the street and who provided him with a ute. And we are asked to believe that this was just business as usual.

This morning the member for Wakefield parroted the whole line that the government is putting out: ‘All the car dealers were treated the same. It is as simple as that. If there is no email, if the email is a forgery, there is no scandal.’ One email may be a forgery, but there are many others that are not. All of them prove conclusively that the Treasurer gave this car dealer an unparalleled level of attention. There is a scandal all right, and the member for Wakefield should know it. There is a long time left for this to run as far as the Treasurer is concerned. Labor resorts, in response, to smear. Right through question time we had answers of smear, raising irrelevant issues that have nothing to do with this, to try and hide the real facts—that this government has done a favour for a mate that is not available to ordinary Australians who are doing the tough work themselves.
Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (4.47 pm)—We have been hearing over the weekend and in the early part of this week that this is the debate that will bring down the Prime Minister and the Treasurer of the country. You know what the attendance was at the shadow Treasurer’s address on this? Twenty-five of the 64 coalition members thought it was important enough to come along. They stayed away in droves. Thirty-nine coalition MPs thought it was such a yawn that they did not even bother to turn up. Certainly, the Leader of the Opposition, who said this was the great debate that was going to bring down the government, bring down the Prime Minister and bring down the Treasurer, did not bother to turn up either. Although I do not know the details—it might have been another fractious party room meeting of the coalition this morning—I am assured it is not true that Brendan had someone in a half-nelson. But I believe it is true that the member who has just spoken, the Leader of the National Party, had most of the party in a sleeper hold, so boring was he in his address here in the great debate that was going to bring down the Prime Minister and was going to bring down the Treasurer, did not bother to turn up either. They stayed away in droves. Although I do not know the details—it might have been another fractious party room meeting of the coalition this morning—I am assured it is not true that Brendan had someone in a half-nelson. But I believe it is true that the member who has just spoken, the Leader of the National Party, had most of the party in a sleeper hold, so boring was he in his address here in the great debate that was going to bring down the government, bring down the Prime Minister and bring down the Treasurer.

A number of accusations have been made by the coalition, and I want to address some of them. For example, there is an accusation that only John Grant received special attention. The truth of the matter is that the emails that the Treasurer released yesterday show that other car dealers were receiving as much, if not more, attention from the Treasurer. At least three other dealers got similar assistance to or greater assistance than that which was offered to John Grant. Treasury also assisted at least four of these dealers by arranging meetings with financiers, including Ford Credit. So that demolishes the argument about special treatment for Mr John Grant.

The coalition are astonished that the Treasurer of the country would have a home fax. That does reveal that they work absolutely strict hours—nine to five. They were a nine-to-five government. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister of this country, now that the Labor Party is in government, do actually work after 5 pm and do have home communications. This is a novelty to the coalition: ‘Wow! How is it that the Treasurer would actually be working after five o’clock and receive faxes and emails at home? Well, well, well!’ What a revelation!

Another accusation is that only John Grant had personal updates sent to the Treasurer’s home fax.

Mr Robb—True!

Dr EMERSON—‘True,’ he says. Almost 30 per cent of all emails on OzCar that Mr Grech sent to the Treasurer’s office contained documents specifically for the Treasurer’s attention. That a fax went to Brisbane simply reflects the fact that the Treasurer was in Brisbane. If the Treasurer had been in Canberra it would not have been sent to his home fax; it would have been sent to his office. Wow! Remarkable revelation! The fact is that this year the Treasurer’s office has sent 209 faxes to his home via email—and sending a fax to the Treasurer’s home fax is supposed to be a unique event!

A further accusation is that only John Grant, according to the coalition, received personal referrals to finance companies, in particular Ford Credit. Mr Gregory Cohen, Managing Director of Ford Credit, was asked a question about this at a Senate inquiry just the other day. Senator Abetz said:

During those meetings, was the plight of any particular car dealer mentioned to you?
Of course, Senator Abetz thinks: ‘Got him! We’re going to get some really great information.’ Mr Cohen said:

Yes.

Senator Abetz said:

And how many?

He was thinking that Mr Cohen would say, ‘Just the one.’ His answer was:

There are at least three or four that I can recall.

So much for special treatment for one person, John Grant.

On the issue of special treatment—that no-one else got any particular considered treatment—the member for Riverina has been generous enough to acknowledge that her constituent did receive some very good treatment. The member for Riverina made a request on behalf of her constituent, as did Bernie Ripoll, the member for Oxley, and in her case she got a response from the Treasurer’s office saying:

Kay,

I will refer your request to the appropriate person in the department, who will get in touch with—

the car dealer.

I have asked them to keep me informed, so I will let you know when I hear anything.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need to follow anything up.

Regards

Amanda

Amanda is an adviser in the Treasurer’s office. The response from the member for Riverina said:

Thankyou so much Amanda. I so appreciate it

Cheers Kay

Isn’t this personal treatment for the constituent of the member for Riverina? Then there was an email from the treasury department to the Treasurer’s office on Monday, 23 March 2009 saying:

FYI in case Kay Hull asks you where this is at - I have spoken with the dealer … and explained to him where things are at.

Later in the email the Treasury official advised as follows about Kay Hull’s dealer:

I told him to contact Capital Finance and to let me know if he gets resistance.

The case of John Grant was supposed to be a unique event, but that is the treatment that was given to a constituent of the member for Riverina, and she has been generous enough to acknowledge that fact.

The Leader of the Opposition has been saying that he has made no accusations against the Prime Minister or the Treasurer. Well, on Friday, 19 June, he said, ‘The Prime Minister and Treasurer have used their offices and taxpayers’ resources to seek advantage for one of their mates and then lied about it to the parliament.’ That is a very serious accusation, which the Leader of the Opposition is now denying. He says: ‘I never made any real accusations. I was just saying, “Look, if it is right then there is a problem here.”’ This is the same Leader of the Opposition who today, under pressure in the media, admitted to having conversations with Mr Godwin Grech. The shadow Treasurer has also admitted to having conversations with Mr Godwin Grech. And yet they have given this impression that here was this public servant doing his job, giving honest and impartial advice, and they were shocked that he gave this evidence. On the basis of that evidence, they called for the Prime Minister and the Treasurer to resign. But the truth is that they had been in personal contact with him, including as recently as Saturday. Is it common for the coalition to ring up treasury officers on a Saturday and say, ‘Oh, I was just thumbing through the phone book and there we are under ’g’—oh, Grech’. I wonder who that bloke is. I’ll give him a call. Hello, Godwin, how are you, brother?’ We know now of some of the basis of that relationship.
The Leader of the National Party just said something that I regard as very offensive. He said that the Australian Business Investment Partnership was set up to support Labor mates. I will ensure that all of those people, including the tradies, the electricians, the plumbers and the carpenters, who would have benefited from this initiative and those who would be in a position to secure the jobs of 50,000 people understand that the Leader of the National Party regards them all as Labor mates. The Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the National Party do not care about them. We will continue to support small business in this country.

In the last few weeks the opposition leader has been promoting around town, to everyone who will listen, a false email that he hoped would be his dirty little shortcut to the prime ministership. Well, it has not worked. A dirty little shortcut to the Lodge; that is what he thought he had, in a forged email, despite being told by Dr Andrew Charlton at the mid-winter ball that he did not send that email. The Leader of the Opposition ignored that advice because he thought he had a dirty little shortcut to the Lodge.

On the Alan Jones program, the opposition leader was asked: ‘Have you sighted the email?’ This was yesterday; it was hilarious. The Leader of the Opposition realised there was a problem emerging with the email so he responded as follows: ‘Alan, I do not want to say any more about the email.’ Yet within 30 seconds the opposition leader volunteered this: ‘This email, let’s talk about the email.’ He is like a moth circling around the light. The law of the light is there and the Leader of the Opposition gets zapped and falls to the ground in a burnt mess. His wings are burnt and he is embarrassed and then dead. Why doesn’t someone do the job for us? Brendan Nelson, come on down; you can be the Colin Barnett of the federal parliament. Come on, Brendan; come on, Peter: save the coalition from this useless Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (Curtin) *(4.57 pm)*—Let me first deal with this confected outrage and hypocrisy on the part of the Prime Minister and the ministers who have come in here to try to defend the indefensible. The Prime Minister has now started referring to himself in the third person—as ‘the Prime Minister’. If you watched him on *The 7.30 Report* last night you would have been amazed at his confected outrage that somebody would dare to question the Prime Minister’s integrity and would actually ask for the Prime Minister to resign. Well, did you know that during 2006 the member for Griffith called for the resignation of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the minister for agriculture? He did it on 15 different occasions in 15 different press conferences, all based on allegations and accusations that were found not to be true. He did this during the course of a royal commission, while the proceedings were on foot, day after day. The member for Griffith—I do not think he was the Leader of the Opposition at that time—came into this House and moved censure motions and matters of public importance and asked a series of questions making the most egregious accusations against the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He accused them of heinous crimes. He accused them of lying. He accused them of turning a blind eye to the funding of suicide bombers in Iraq. That is the depth to which this Prime Minister was prepared to go. He accused them and implicated the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister in the funding of suicide bombers.

He knew that the royal commission would require that those ministers give evidence. He knew that the making of such heinous allegations in the House every day would be
covered by parliamentary privilege yet still reported on the news at night. He went on and on, not just calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister but actually calling for the Deputy Prime Minister to resign and leave the parliament, and this was all during a royal commission. Then, when the royal commission made no adverse finding against the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs or the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, did the member for Griffiths apologise? Did he say, ‘I’m sorry I’ve overreached; I am sorry I have made these heinous allegations based on no evidence at all’? Did he resign? No. Do you know what he did? He stood for the leadership of the Labor Party. That is the kind of conduct that this government condones.

I turn now to the Treasurer. I witnessed the Treasurer’s brazen evasion of answers in question time today. He refused to answer the most basic, straightforward, simple questions such as, ‘How many car dealers got this kind of treatment, Treasurer?’ Guess how many car dealers? One—the Prime Minister’s used-car dealer mate who is a member of the Prime Minister’s luncheon club, who lives down the road from the Prime Minister, who has given the Prime Minister a free car year after year worth thousands of dollars to the Prime Minister. The Treasurer refused to answer any of these questions.

The Australian public would be astounded to learn that, under the Prime Minister’s own Standards of ministerial ethics, a minister is required to provide ‘an honest and comprehensive account’ of his activities in answer to questions from members of parliament. A failure to comply with these standards is considered to be a breach of those ministerial standards. The Treasurer has failed to provide an honest and comprehensive account time after time. I listened to the Treasurer say in parliament on 4 June that the Prime Minister’s used-car dealer mate was treated just like everyone else and his comment, ‘I have no idea what the outcome of that was.’ Evidence that was given under oath in the Senate inquiry contradicted the Treasurer on every single claim that he has made, yet the Australian public will be astonished to find that in the Standards of ministerial ethics ministers are not to mislead the House. It is not only a breach of this House but also a breach of the standards— (Time expired)

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (5.02 pm)—Although I am a newcomer to this place, I understand that this would be the first time that the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party has been reduced to speaking in the last five-minute slot. What a shame, with the success of Peter Costello, that the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party is being treated with such disrespect by her own party as to be made the nightwatchwoman in this very sad debate.

I have waited for an hour in this MPI to hear the killer blows on the Treasurer. I realise now that those opposite are putting forward five little points. The first point they have made is that somehow Mr Grant is the only person that the Treasurer has assisted. This is not at all true. Mr Greg Cohen, a director of Ford Credit, recalled in his cross-examination by Senator Abetz that at least three or four people with many more communications than Mr Grant were promoted. The opposition bangs on like a broken record on this issue. In fact, between 15 October 2008 and 19 June 2009, there were something like 130 emails from Mr Grech to the Treasurer, 20 of which related directly to car dealers. Again, even though they try to say that Mr Grant received special treatment, Michael Delaney, the head of the Motor
Traders Association of Australia, has made it clear that many people received assistance from the government.

The second proposition that the opposition have tried to raise on this issue during this MPI is that sending faxes home somehow proves something sinister. Their third proposition is that to send a fax home on a Friday night must clearly indicate some sort of malfeasance. Not at all—in fact, as the Treasurer has already related, there were 209 faxes this year alone, comprising 1,487 pages. Indeed, 4,638 pages have been sent to the Treasurer’s house since 2007. If we go further, another implication is that raising the issue of individual car dealers with Ford somehow left Ford with no choice but to look at these matters. This is not true and actually gets to the heart of the issue that the Treasurer was dealing with. In the car-dealing industry in Australia, there are 1,400 new car dealers with 3,500 outlets. Over a million new cars were sold in 2007-08. The new car retailers have an estimated turnover of $47 billion and 52,000 people are directly employed. There was a liquidity crisis late last year for car dealerships previously financed by GE Money and GMAC. This led to the establishment of the OzCar SPV. Ford Credit—the parent company in America—had not made any decisions at the time of the foundation of the SPV in December last year to withdraw from the Australian market. However, following complex negotiations, signalled already, I stress, by the government in December—because the arrangements for Ford were different from those for GE Money and GMAC—Ford Credit was eventually included in the facility. There we have it. The Treasurer, his office, his officials and the government as a whole, on the one hand, have been endeavouring to ensure that there is no collapse of the car industry.

Mr SHORTEN—I understand that the member for Bowman finds certain facts inconvenient, but it has been said by the Motor Traders Association of Australia—it has been established—that if this support had not been offered to the car dealers late last year there would have been 500 dealers out of business and the potential loss of 75,000 direct and indirect jobs. The cascade effect into the component industry and the production of automobiles in Australia would have been diabolical. Indeed, the impact upon the bottom line of state revenues would also have been serious. This was the issue that the Treasurer was dealing with. These trumped-up charges that somehow one dealer was getting special attention are not borne out by an examination of the facts.

The truth of the matter is that this MPI is a desperate gesture because the opposition overplayed their hand. They relied on faulty information. They relied on verballing the Prime Minister’s staff at social functions. They have been hawking documents around like some tawdry, bizarre dealership. The questions which they should be offering to answer are: who has read this email; who were they giving it to; who gave the document to Senator Abetz; why was the Leader of the Opposition so confident that evidence was coming; who was doing the briefing; and, most importantly, who was doing the checking? Unfortunately, Wile E Coyote could not have done a better job of running out of cliff and getting himself into all sorts of trouble than the Leader of the Opposition. And that is the problem with the last two days: the opposition have wasted the time of the parliament of Australia—(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The time allotted for this discussion has now concluded.

Mr Laming—By giving out his phone number.
AUSTRALIAN WINE AND BRANDY CORPORATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009
ROAD TRANSPORT REFORM (DANGEROUS GOODS) REPEAL BILL 2009

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.08 pm)—by leave—I move:
That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Public Works Committee

Report

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.09 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the third report for 2009 of the committee, relating to the proposed fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Securities and Investments Commission in Sydney, and construction of housing for Defence at Yamanto Hills, Ipswich, Queensland.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.09 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the committee’s third report for 2009 on referrals made in February and March 2009. The first project addressed in this report is the fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Securities and Investments Commission at Market Street in Sydney. The project was referred to the committee on 5 February 2009 at an estimated cost of $30.8 million. The committee was not satisfied with the initial cost plan provided by ASIC and was forced to seek further information on a number of issues. These subsequent inclusions increased the estimated cost of the work to $35.2 million including GST.

ASIC submitted that the primary purpose of the proposed work is to collocate its 870 Sydney based staff at a single site to benefit from the resultant operational and cost efficiencies and to provide room for any future increase in staff numbers. In its examination of the project the committee found that the scope of the work, which comprised the fit-out of five floors at 100 Martin Place, would accommodate only 775 staff—insufficient to achieve ASIC’s aim of collocation. At the site inspection ASIC told the committee that it was awaiting approval for the lease on an additional floor, which would allow it to accommodate 890 staff. Approval was granted subsequent to the public hearing, incurring an additional $2.48 million in fit-out costs and bringing the total estimated project budget to $37.68 million. The committee recommends that the work proceed at this cost on the grounds that it will fulfil ASIC’s collocation requirements and provide limited capacity for future growth.

The referral for construction of housing for Defence at Yamanto Hills, Ipswich, Queensland, has been deferred indefinitely pending the resolution of noise issues related to the introduction at RAAF Base Amberley of the FA18F Super Hornet. The committee is concerned that the withdrawal was due to a lack of basic consultation by Defence Housing Australia with its primary client, the Department of Defence. The committee recommends that DHA establish internal protocols to ensure that in future all such matters are resolved prior to referral of a project. The committee will be seeking to satisfy itself on this point when the project is re-referred.

I would like to thank all the committee members, as well as the secretariat, for their work in relation to this inquiry and commend the report to the House.
RURAL ADJUSTMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 22 June, on motion by Mr Burke:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (5.12 pm)—I am pleased to continue my remarks on this bill, which is not disputed in any way by the opposition. The Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009 simply extends the terms of engagement that members of the National Rural Advisory Council may have on that council. Yesterday I thanked the members of the council for their engagement with rural communities and their willingness to listen. I also appreciate the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry extending the exceptional circumstances declaration in my electorate of Farrer for a few more months. Pretty well all of the declarations now run out in March 2010. We will be looking to the minister to make further extensions should the drought not lift.

As is always the case at this time of year, we see across rural areas of Australia a patchy result. There has been reasonable cropping in some areas and reasonable water allocations in others, but pretty well all along the Murray River in New South Wales we are still struggling. It will have to rain much, much more in the catchment for that to translate to improved water allocations for general-security and high-security users. One of the successes that I believe the previous government had with NRAC was in being able to engender an understanding within that organisation that drought is not just a matter of climate and rainfall but also a matter of water allocation.

I have spoken before in this House about the level of confusion and bewilderment in my electorate on the approach that the government has taken to water generally and to buybacks in particular. More recently, in the central Murray forests of New South Wales the approach of the environment minister to the superb parrot and the ongoing logging operations has indeed horrified us.

I want to touch on the minister for the environment’s actions because we as a community are, as I said, bewildered and confused, but we are also angry and disgusted. Some weeks back the issue hit the newspapers with a statement that the federal minister was directing the end of logging activities in the central Murray forests. These activities are conducted in a sustainable way under the auspices and the environmental supervision of the New South Wales government. The requirements that foresters have to meet in terms of the environment are strong and appropriate and they should be allowed to remain in place. But our federal department decided to use the superb parrot, which is on the threatened species list but towards the lower end of the list, as an excuse to bring the force of the federal EPBC legislation onto this issue and therefore take it away from New South Wales.

I believe it was only because of the strong response in the media, the reaction of talkback radio and the reaction of colleagues in this House and in the New South Wales parliament that the minister and his department took a step back. When I asked him, in consideration in detail on environmental issues last week, whether he would admit that logging in the central Murray forests was in fact not illegal, he did admit that logging was not illegal, but he did not give us any comfort that he or his department would take any action to reassure us about our future and allow this perfectly sustainable logging activity to continue; he just mumbled something about ongoing negotiations with New South Wales.
If you drive through inner Sydney, through the suburbs of Marrickville and Redfern, you will see signs saying, ‘Save the river red gum.’ That is the audience that this minister and this government are playing to—not the people who really matter, whose jobs are threatened, but the inner-city groups. While I make no criticism of their views, I will say this: they are totally uninformed. They, like the minister, have never travelled into western New South Wales and looked at the river to understand its operation or the life of the communities that live along it. If they had, they would not have pushed this decision. The decision comes from a Victorian decision to lock up the forests on the Victorian side of the river. There is a determination by the National Parks Association and the Wilderness Society in New South Wales to do the same on the New South Wales side.

It shows a complete lack of understanding about many things but in particular about forestry. Remember that these forests were not here millennia ago; they have been in existence for maybe 130 years, and they have grown to a level of maturity that has seen the forest stagnate, if you like. In order to regenerate the trees and keep the forest alive, the logging practice has moved from selective individual harvesting of trees to another type of harvesting which involves—and the green movement extravagantly call it clear-felling—removing a patch of trees 50 to 80 metres wide to produce a pocket of light in the forest to allow the air and sunlight in and allow the forest to regenerate. What these forests need more than anything, of course, is a drink; and that will only come when it rains. Nobody is taking the water away from them. The forests need a drink. In the absence of a drink, they are going to struggle, and continuing careful logging, recognising their level of stress, is entirely appropriate.

But this type of patch-felling has infuriated our green lobbies and environmentalists and they have taken serious action—including, as I said, driving this minister and his department to take the extraordinary step of saying they were going to close down activities. The minister has back-pedalled from that, but I still have in my possession the letter that his department wrote to New South Wales forestry demanding four separate actions, with deadlines including 31 May—which has passed, thank goodness—and other actions, all about restricting these genuinely sustainable logging activities along the Murray.

These forests will regenerate either by harvesting or by having a good drink, which will happen in due course. They will not regenerate by fire—unlike the blue gum forests that we have seen burn in the Kosciuszko National Park—because they are not high-altitude forests, but they will burn nevertheless. If they are locked up, that is inevitably going to be the result. If you look at the way that the Indigenous people have managed forestry in these parts of Australia, fire has been a very strong part of that. But the agenda of the federal department of the environment is to lock up these forests, the Lachlan, the Murrumbidgee and the Lower Darling—in fact, all sustainably managed red gum forests in New South Wales. Shame on them. This minister should hang his head in shame for the stress and the worry that he is putting the communities that I represent through.

The other source of stress and worry is of course the water buyback. I have spoken about that before in this House, but the latest example that comes to mind is the purchase of Booligal Station at the end of the Lachlan River. The Parliamentary Secretary for Water talked big about the amount of wetlands that were going to be boosted, birds that were going to return and water that was going to
go back into the environment, but he may not be aware that the Lachlan has only reached the Murray twice in white man’s history. Booligal Station is extraordinarily dry not because greedy irrigators are taking the water but because it rarely has a water flow through it, certainly not in these times of drought. But, again, we saw an extraordinary sum of taxpayers’ money allocated to buy this water and buy this land.

I recall a similar exercise with the purchase of Yanga Station, near Balranald, which is also in my electorate. There were big promises from the New South Wales government at the time that thousands of visitors would come to Yanga Station—the small and relatively insignificant farming activities would be replaced by a boom in tourism not seen before, National Parks would be able to station new employees there and the local Indigenous people would be able to get involved. It ticked every box. Unfortunately, well over a year later—probably two years later—we had a rather low-profile opening of Yanga National Park. I do not know whether anyone has done a visitor count, but I know that it would be very small indeed. As for the jobs: of course they have never eventuated. The park is managed from the National Parks office in Hay. There is nothing wrong with that, but New South Wales do not have the resources to put people there to manage the park properly, to even begin to implement all of the promises that they talked about at the time. We are going to see the same thing with Booligal Station, and we are not going to see any real water returned to the environment as a result.

As we who live and work in the irrigation regions of Australia know, all that is being purchased with this silly exercise is air space in the dam. Water reform should be simple—in fact, it is not. I was in Wentworth on the weekend, which is where the Darling meets the Murray in western New South Wales. The town was celebrating its 150th year—looking back 150 years and looking forward 150 years. When I talked to people about what they thought might be different in 150 years time, they were, sadly, very doubtful that the community would be there in the same way that it is now. The most commonly expressed sentiment was regarding the federal government’s approach to water. Okay, we accept that water is going to be taken out of our districts; we have had that message hammered home. But what is going to happen in its place? And what are you going to do, Mr Rudd, about the dislocation and the rural communities in crisis as a result? What are your plans for our communities, for our future, given that you are removing so much of our water?

But of course no planning has actually happened. I was amazed to see that the Wakool Shire Council, along the Murray River, has done its own socioeconomic study. I should not be amazed, because if these studies are not going to be done by the appropriate bodies and agencies in government then I guess local communities will have to do them, in an attempt to try to make their case. The study that Wakool Shire Council commissioned, by RMCG Consulting, clearly shows that water leaving the district permanently will result in loss of people, reduced income and reduced business in service industries. It was a rigorous study in one district that has about 300,000 megalitres in just this one district—remember there are 300,000 megalitres of water entitlement. What this study showed was the level of impact. For every 1,000 megalitres of water lost from the region—and remember there are 300,000 megalitres in just this one district—there would be $300,000 of agricultural production lost within this one shire; up to $900,000 lost from the regional economy; $3,500 in direct rate revenue lost, which of course is just the beginning—we know the flow-on effects from that; and the loss of agricultural and
regional jobs. If you multiply the effect across a district you do in fact end up with ghost towns along the Murray.

As somebody who represents these areas, I am quite frightened by what we have to do as a community to mitigate the effects of this—given, as I said, that the government are very keen to purchase the water. As soon as they can they spruik those purchases from the rooftops—meaningless though they are, as I said—and talk about what good things they have done, to satisfy, I am guessing, the inner-city voters in Sydney, Melbourne and other coastal areas of Australia. But what they have left us with is truly something horrible. I do not want to contemplate the future. So I use the opportunity of this debate on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill to again ask the government to please allocate some resources to helping the communities adjust to their future. We know it will be very different; it is already very different. Help us adjust.

One final thing I want to mention in the context of this bill relates to the stimulus funding. Much has been said about the poor targeting of the schools money. But what particularly irritates me as I look around my communities is not necessarily that schools and facilities that are provided to our communities are not what we might really want—sometimes they are, but mostly they are not; they are basically what we are told we deserve—but that the actual mechanism for delivering, for example, portable school halls or other pieces of physical infrastructure is all done from afar. I have heard the most horrific figures about how much the New South Wales government is slicing off. In the case of one school project almost half of the funds, for a hall that half the town does not want, are not even going to leave Sydney; they are directly going from the federal government to the New South Wales government to prop up its ailing bureaucracy and infrastructure—we all know the parlous state of New South Wales government finances. If these projects were managed locally, what a great job they would do.

A weekend ago I was at an opening of a new occasional childcare centre in South Albury. What was remarkable about this project was that the entire project management was done by the Rotary Club of Albury North. In Rotary you have people with expertise in a wide range of areas. They came together and found the carpenters, the architects, the designers, the builders, the carpet layers, the painters, the fittings and the fixtures, and they went with their networks in local communities, as only Rotary and other service clubs have, and they made all this happen, before time and under budget. It could not have been done by a government department in the same way. It was quite extraordinary. I got back to my office and I had a letter from the same Rotary club raising another matter. They know that carers’ accommodation is needed at the Albury Base Hospital. They and the Zonta Club have been working on a proposal examining how facilities in other regional areas work. They have conducted local-needs surveys, joined with the Bone Marrow Donor Institute and the Fight Cancer Foundation, formed a working group and surveyed similar facilities, and they have something up and running. Now, quite reasonably, they are looking to either state or federal government to provide some funding for this. Imagine if we instigated a policy that focused on local service clubs doing project management where they can. Imagine how much local stimulus that would provide—and that appears to be what the government is desperately trying to do. It would not just be at times when we needed to inject money into communities; it could be at any time and it could be an ongoing process.
Every newspaper story about New South Wales that I pick up talks about the extraordinary amounts of money that anybody in New South Wales has to pay to get anything and the ridiculous procurement hoops they have to jump through even if it is for ice-creams or bandages—the smallest of things. They are not allowed to source goods for their hospitals, schools and local communities. We do have the networks there. We have community groups who know how to do this and who can do it better than anyone else. We should be calling on those groups.

In conclusion, I look forward to NRAC working closely with the communities in the electorate of Farrer. We all look forward to the day when they can be put on ice because the drought is no longer, but that day is some distance off. I commend the bill.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (5.30 pm)—I listened very closely and with interest to the member for Farrer’s speech on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009. She voiced some concerns about water, government buybacks et cetera which many people in the north of the state would share. I urge her to keep an eye on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the way in which its board views the mandatory content provisions when they are developing the Murray-Darling Basin plan. Those provisions—and I think there are five pages of them in the act—were put in place by the former government. They do provide a number of guidelines for the planning process. They are ‘mandatory content’ and are not to be varied. I ask all people on the Murray-Darling to keep a very close eye on that because a number of areas in that planning process could have quite dramatic impacts on the farm sector, particularly the irrigation sector, if they are not adhered to in the appropriate fashion. The government may attempt to change some of those provisions or suggest to the authority or to the board that they go lightly on some of the mandatory content and not so lightly on others. It is something we all need to bear in mind.

We are debating today essentially the rural adjustment program and the reappointment of the National Rural Advisory Council committee. That has been in place for some time. This bill allows those people who have served an initial term to serve up to two terms longer in that role. Obviously, I and other speakers are supportive of that, but it does give all of us the opportunity to talk about what is happening in drought funding and drought policy. NRAC was set up by the previous government and has carried on during this government’s term under the same guidelines. This is one of the first changes we have seen and it is a positive change in my view.

NRAC has had oversight of drought policy. Drought policy has really been driven over the last decade or longer now by what has been called ‘exceptional circumstances’—exceptional events in terms of climate and how they trigger certain assistance from the government. The member for Goldstein, who has just left the chamber, would well remember when he was with the National Farmers Federation back in the 1980s that, prior to exceptional circumstances, drought was considered under natural disaster auspices. Given that the government is reviewing drought policy generally, it should have a close look at the previous natural disaster policies because there may be something to be learnt from the past.

I have argued from time to time that exceptional drought—not just a dry spell—should be considered in a similar fashion to other natural disasters, such as the Darwin cyclone, the incident that occurred in North Queensland, the Newcastle earthquake, the Sydney hailstorm and the Wollongong mudslide, where there were all sorts of arguments
with insurance companies. In natural disasters governments of different persuasions have come in to assist people, as they should. What we have tended to do with drought policy is say that a one-in-25-year or a one-in-50-year drought is just a business risk that you have to accept and take on board.

I have raised from time to time a solution to that. A hailstorm is a natural disaster, and there was assistance for those people. Cyclones are no different to droughts in that they occur occasionally. There might only be one in 100 years, but people have not put aside money to make sure that they can replace the building they are in. The insurance companies create havoc and a whole range of other things happen at those times. We need to view natural disasters in a slightly different way and establish a national natural disaster fund. If all taxpayers set aside a sum of money, when a natural disaster did strike—whether it be in the city or the country, or whether it be a massive cyclone event or a mudslide at Coffs Harbour or Wollongong—we would have a fund that was depoliticised to the extent that it was triggered under certain circumstances.

An extreme drought—and in my view it would probably be more extreme than that which triggers exceptional circumstances—would trigger some assistance, as would an extreme hail event across Sydney that caused massive amounts of damage. A dollar a week from every Australian raises a billion dollars in a year. I am not suggesting that we are going to take a dollar a week from every child, but it highlights the capacity to raise a lot of money with very little coming from each individual. We could set aside $2 billion or have a fund in which the amount paid in was reduced when it reached a certain level—there is a word for that which I cannot think of.

If we carried out a survey of the insurance companies and looked at what natural disasters have cost the nation—bearing in mind that they cost the individuals who are impacted on much more significantly than they cost the nation, but any one of us can be in a situation in which an unfortunate event occurs—we would find that there have been only two years since the early 1970s in which natural disasters have cost more than $1 billion. That is the information that I have been able to obtain. Most times, on average natural disasters cost the nation somewhere between $200 million and $300 million—20c to 30c a week from every Australian would cover such events through a depoliticised national natural disaster fund.

With climate change and a whole range of things, such as the tightening of the insurance markets and global economic markets, I suggest we look closely at how we are going to fund these events—not only in terms of droughts—into the future and how we are going to decouple them from the political process. There have been a number of circumstances in which an election has been around the corner, a disaster has occurred and government aid has gone in because it is a marginal seat, whereas there have been similar disasters where people have been left to themselves to argue with the insurance companies. It is something we should have a close look at.

Within the electorate of New England, the drought has ebbed and flowed, as it has in most electorates. We have been relatively well off in recent years. I say that knowing full well that the areas around Bundarra and Dundee, which I am sure the press gallery—and it is good to see so many of them here—are well aware of, are still in my view suffering from the impacts of drought. I have been in contact with the minister and I appreciate what he has done. NRAC, the advisory council, has reviewed those circumstances
and given a negative recommendation to the minister. But I put on record that there are areas within regions that are still subject to drought even though the majority of some of those regions are in a relatively good position.

That highlights one of the underlying problems with this. If an area applies for exceptional circumstances, for instance, and there are sub-areas within it that have had relatively good rainfall and pasture growth or cropping events, they can rule each other out. Occasionally, making applications for quite large areas has been to the detriment of the smaller areas within them which have been greatly impacted and are still in drought.

I give credit to Keith Perrett, who is not in my electorate but not far from it. I know Keith quite well. He has been the chairman of NRAC, which is not an easy job—but it is one that he and his board have done within the guidelines that were set up by the previous government and carried on by the present government—given some of the blemishes in the guidelines and the criticisms from time to time that come from people within the various areas who believe they should still be accessing exceptional circumstances payments.

I also pay credit to an adviser of mine, a chap called Spot Cunningham, who is an expert on land use and drought, and an Indigenous associate of his, Terry Doolan. Terry is well versed in some of the Indigenous practices in land use that were carried on before white man arrived. I spent some time with Terry in the electorate of the member for Parkes.

Mr Coulton—Did you have a passport?

Mr WINDSOR—Do you have Louth? No, it is not in your electorate; it is on the Darling River. I spent time with Terry at Louth discussing many water issues and activities that occurred in that area in the Aboriginal community. Both those men are well versed in land use management from slightly different angles and have been of great assistance to me in terms of their advice. I was with Terry only last week and we were talking about the Murray-Darling system and the Menindee Lakes. For those who do not know, there are very high evaporation rates at those lakes. It is quite a ridiculous structure in a sense. I know that that would probably upset some of the people in the Broken Hill area, but the way in which water is stored in those very shallow systems and the evaporation rates that occur in those systems are quite extraordinary.

Mr Katter—Hear, hear!

Mr WINDSOR—If we are serious about adapting to climate change, we have to look at re-engineering structures like the Menindee Lakes and making them deeper and cover less surface area. In a sense, you can create water because you do not let as much water evaporate from the system. I appreciate the member for Kennedy is an expert on northern waters and other land use and social issues. He is well read on these issues and someone whose counsel I always consider when given.

Speaking of climate change, I have not supported the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that is before the parliament at the moment. It is quite meaningless to have a five per cent target. It is pointless rearranging the economy to achieve a five per cent objective. I know that there are provisions in there such that if the rest of the globe comes on board we move out to 25 per cent.

I have a private member’s bill on a similar issue before the parliament which has higher requirements in carbon equivalent emissions reductions than the government’s bill. One of the recommendations in my private member’s bill—and I have talked to some of the bureaucrats in the building from time to
time about this—is that there be a calculation of the impact of climate change on run-off within the Murray-Darling system. We are constantly being told that climate change is going to impact on run-off and water within the system, and that is used as justification for the buyback of water within that system. I am told that the amount of run-off could be up to a 30 per cent reduction—obviously that percentage varies—on 1990 levels. That will have an extraordinary impact on the Murray-Darling system and the things that the member for Farrer spoke about will become much more amplified. Some suggest that climate change is just a myth and it is never going to happen. The question I would pose—and we are all very concerned about what is happening to agriculture in the Murray-Darling system—is: what if it happens and 30 per cent is the reduction in run-off? The significance of that for the irrigation industry, food production and the farm sector is just catastrophic. People who are suggesting that this should just be ignored and we should hope to God that it does not happen should be a little bit more considerate of the other side of the debate and consider: what if it does happen?

One of the what-ifs that is there—and this is an assumption that the rest of the globe is not going to do anything about this issue—is that we who live in the Murray-Darling system are going to suffer the brunt of other people’s emissions and human induced effects. One of the things we should do is to calculate those effects. The climate scientists are saying—and I think the member for Kennedy would verify this—that some parts of Australia will get more rain because of the human induced atmospheric carbon emissions. Other parts will get less rain and the Murray-Darling system, particularly the southern end, is going to be one of those areas, which will be a human induced problem.

What is wrong with fixing both those problems by shifting some of the water in North Queensland into that part of the component that is driven by climate change within the Murray-Darling system? Theoretically, people would like to think that if we take control of our emissions we will reduce the problem and everything will go back to nature. One of the things that I would like the government and the parliament to consider is, if that does not actually happen, how we repair the human induced damage to the Murray-Darling system. The only way I can see to do that is to bring water into it. The fairest way to do that would be to bring it from the source that is being created by the same human induced conditions, from the areas that are going to get more. Obviously, the ocean will be one of those sources. We are told we are going to have more water in the oceans because of the ice melt. I happen to believe that; others do not. But we will all be dead before we find out who was right. Some of those structural things need to be looked at; otherwise, we run the risk of destroying one of the great food bowls of this nation.

The member for Kennedy, who will give one of his brilliant speeches a bit later in this debate, will I am sure talk about the proportion of water in the north. I know he does not like praise, but praise is due to him from time to time, and I enjoy his speeches. He does make a very significant point about these massive amounts of water. People say Australia is a very dry nation, but the Fitzroy River in Western Australia, for instance, has the second highest inflow into an ocean of any river in the world. We are surrounded by water. Some people in Adelaide say they need someone from Tamworth to give up their water so that someone in Adelaide can have a drink. Adelaide is on the edge of water: they just have to take the salt out and drink it. There is plenty there and there is more coming, apparently, if climate change has anything to do with it in the future.
The other issue I raise is land use. Essentially, to manage drought we have to look at land use for the future. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources. The committee will be going to Tamworth next week and we will be looking at some of the issues up there, particularly the innovative issues such as no-tool farming techniques, some of the pasture technologies out there now and GPS technologies, such as Tramtrac. The issue I raise with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is that when he is formulating drought policy for the future he will need to look at the things that are naturally drought-proofing some of our farmlands and try to promote those. I think the member for Parkes would agree that no-tool farming is one of those issues that actually creates additional moisture in cropping technologies. It should be promoted and there are other technologies that should be promoted as well. (Time expired)

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (5.50 pm)—I rise to speak on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009. Essentially, this bill is to extend the period of tenure for the members of the NRAC board. I do not have any major concerns with that. I think the members of the NRAC board are quite competent, and its chair, Keith Perrett, has done a good job. I am a little concerned about why this is happening. As we look into the budget estimates, that there are no forward estimates beyond 2010 for drought assistance alarmed me a little. Hopefully, that is just like an optimistic weather forecast and that we will get out of it, but I am concerned. I am also concerned about the subtle changes in the way that drought is being referred to by this government and how the government perceives agriculture in general. In a report that came out last year, the word ‘dryness’ has replaced the word ‘drought’. Dryness then becomes a permanent state of affairs rather than a drought, which has a beginning, a middle and an end. I am concerned about that. I will speak about the issues of my electorate of Parkes in a minute.

The other issue that concerns me is that all of my electorate has come out of exceptional circumstances funding. I have had farmers trying to apply for the transitional funding and finding it very difficult. There is quite a large document and most need assistance with it. Not many of them have been successful. One of the criteria in this document is for a farmer to put his climate change strategy for his farm. I was a farmer for 35 years and I just find that a very vague thing to have to do. If they are successful after filling out the form and have a climate change strategy, they then have funding that enables them to undertake some sort of TAFE course or training to improve their management. I find that patronising to the farmers of Australia. What is being said in fact is; the reason that you are having financial difficulties is not because you are in drought; it is because we are now in a period of permanent dryness and, basically, you lack the education to handle these changes, so we are going to fund you to do a course to improve your management. I believe that teaching a farmer to adapt to climate change would be tantamount to teaching your grandmother to suck eggs.

We will not go into the debate of whether the climate is changing or whether climate change is man made; it is about incremental changes over a period of time. Farmers have dealt with changes in climate on a short-term basis—from periods of drought to flood to frost to high temperature—and they have adapted to that very well. What they have not been able to adapt to is where, in certain areas, they have had drought for seven, eight or nine years, which has been recorded as possibly the worst drought in 100 years.
There were reports of drought in the 1900s. My father talked about his father talking about the big drought in 1900 to 1910 where the Gwydir River, which runs through the area where I live, completely ceased to run and had a body of grass over it. So long-term, serious drought is not new to Australia. One of the things that probably changed the way we looked at our climate was the period of the fifties and sixties, which were exceptionally good years for agriculture, particularly in eastern Australia. Maybe that became the benchmark on which we judge things. I feel that there is a shift. I think this shows there is a clear lack of understanding of the level of expertise in the hands of farmers in rural Australia today.

The member for New England mentioned no-till farming and tram tracking—a whole range of things for moisture retention. Indeed, 30 years ago my brothers and I were some of the first people in Australia, in conjunction with the New South Wales department of agriculture and Monsanto, who did work on zero-till farming. It was quite revolutionary at the time. Following on from that, the University of Sydney, at the Livingston Farm at Moree, really bit the bullet and modified machinery. Indeed, the way that we farm now is entirely different. If farmers today farmed like their fathers or grandfathers did they would have serious problems.

We need to have a clear understanding that the problems farmers are having now with drought are not of their own making. I am speaking generally. Obviously there are cases where there is poor management, but in general it is not of their own making; it is because of a period of exceptional lack of rain for many, many years. The tragedy of this is that quite often the people who tend to survive these long periods of drought are the older farmers, the more established ones, the ones who have not taken any risks and do not have a large amount of debt. Obviously some of the ones who cannot hang on have large amounts of debt and may be overextended. But the real tragedy is that quite often the most vulnerable are the young farmers. I have a stack of them in my electorate. More often than not they get a tertiary degree, work, gain a lot of managerial and agronomic experience and then come back and put that in place with the corporate knowledge of their family and do very well, but they have extended themselves. While someone who has a higher level of debt, because of buying a farm and purchasing machinery, can handle a couple of years, seven or eight years is nearly beyond them.

The real tragedy of this drought is that we are losing many of our young people. As the world starts to really think about where food comes from, I am really concerned about where our farmers of the future will come from. I firmly believe that the family farm is the most efficient unit of agriculture. I speak from personal experience. I have to say, it can be quite a stressful unit to work in, but on the whole it is the most efficient way. It is a game that you can learn from knee-high. The best farmers I know are the ones who have combined generations of experience with modern education and learning. I am concerned that we will lose those farmers.

Specifically, in my area I have places that have not been badly affected by the drought. The northern parts of my electorate and, indeed, my own area have been quite as fortunate. You can see in the areas that have not been affected by drought, as you go around as a member of parliament, that the age of the community is much younger. But, unfortunately, that is not the same right across my electorate. At the moment the last regions that were taken out of drought funding, where farmers lost their EC payments, were in the southern part of my electorate. I am talking about Dubbo, Wellington and Mudgee. I am not going to be overly critical...
of NRAC because basically those areas have had a bit of rain and there is a green tinge. NRAC only makes a recommendation on seasonal conditions and, ultimately, it is up to the minister to decide whether there has been a sufficient level of recovery.

In the last two or three months I have dealt with a considerable amount of correspondence and phone calls. And I acknowledge the staff from Minister Burke who are here today taking note of this debate. It is notable that they are here and I know that they are aware of correspondence that has come through me because I handed it on. I know that all governments battle with the problem of the lines on a map. I have had a conversation with the minister about that and the problem of people in isolated pockets. The member for New England alluded to it being a problem in his area as well.

But this is no consolation for people who find themselves now with no foreseeable income. They have sold everything they can to get through the drought. It is extremely frustrating for them. Lambs are now at record value but, because of the drought, they have had poor joining percentages and they have not had enough feed for long enough to finish their livestock, whether lambs or cattle. So they have been severely hampered financially.

To top it off, wheat growers in the area were severely disadvantaged last harvest because of the shemozzle caused by the removal of the single desk. There was not even a price for grain after harvest. They were extremely stressed financially and did not have the ability to store their grain and market it throughout the year—as is the way now with grain marketing. They did not have the ability to purchase infrastructure to store that grain, nor did they have the ability to hang onto it. They had to sell it to the first person who would give them a price. I was somewhat disturbed by one of the minister’s last contributions in this place with regard to this when he claimed that there had been an advantage in dollar terms because of the deregulation of the wheat market. Plainly, out on the ground, that is not the case.

I believe that the minister—and I have contacted the minister—needs to engage with the farmers. It is one thing to be the one to deliver good news, but I also think that leadership and ministerial responsibility means that you have to deliver the bad news and you have to explain the reason behind that. As the minister and the government work out where we are going with this drought funding, I think it would be very beneficial for him to speak now to the farmers who have come off EC so that they can explain to him exactly what this means. In a lot of cases it means selling out. It means leaving. While there is an ability to obtain household support, what has been keeping these people going is the interest subsidy, and the removal of that interest subsidy pretty well means that they are going to have to move on.

Maybe some farmers in the Coonamble, the Coonabarabran or the North West Slopes areas, who got an extension last year for seasonal conditions, will be able to organise finance, because there is light at the end of the tunnel for them. But I think the ones who missed out last year and the ones who are in a fairly dry period this time will have trouble in obtaining carry-on finance.

So I would ask the minister to take seriously his responsibility to his constituents. The agriculture sector, despite the years of drought, was responsible for the positive balance of trade figures in the first quarter of this year. The agriculture sector has the ability to carry its weight as a viable part of the Australian community but it needs help to get through this period of time. There are
indications that the season is changing and that we might be looking for a crop this year, but we need to nurture these farmers.

We need to put money into research so that we know where the next best thing is. In farming I firmly believe that, if you think you know how agriculture works, you should get out of it because it is an ever-changing feast. How I operated my property, on the knowledge I had, was entirely different from the way my father operated, and I have to say that in the couple of years I have been out of the industry things have moved on. My brothers now have tractors that are completely satellite guided and the precision they have and the savings they make are quite spectacular.

I would ask the minister to come out and engage with the people on the ground. He is very quick to get on his feet and play politics in this place. He is very quick to poke fun at the Nationals and ‘cockies corner’, as it is referred to—that name might be a badge of pride up this way—but the people in regional Australia want him to be out there and want him to engage. They want him to speak with them and explain to them why he thinks they no longer need support to get through this drought. He might be able to explain how they are going to carry on with their farms. He might be able to explain who is going to produce the food for this country—and it is not 20 million people we feed; it is 70 million. If Australia stops carrying its share of the load in food production, it will not be Australians who go hungry but someone in a Third World country that relies on our exports.

While I do not have any problem with change in the terms of ENRAC, I do have a serious problem with the way this government is dealing with our farmers in this particular situation. I ask that this government—and the minister in particular—give some serious consideration away from the politics. I would gladly allow him to spend as much time as he likes. Rural Australians are very polite and respectful people and they would treat him well, but I think he needs to stop concentrating on point scoring in here and engage with his constituents.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (6.09 pm)—On so many occasions since its election, the Rudd government has made it absolutely clear that it is not willing to support our farmers into the future. Whilst I welcome the government’s decision to continue with drought support for this financial year, I am at a loss as to the decision for it to cease in 2010. This year’s budget papers clearly show that all drought support, including all exceptional circumstance programs, will cease by mid-2010. Page 60 of the portfolio budget statement 2009-10 in the Agricultural, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio unequivocally states:

The reduction in expenses between 2009-10 and 2010-11 is due to the cessation of drought programs.

I raised this with the minister in the Main Committee when I was given the opportunity and the minister gave me a commitment that should our farmers still be in drought at that time—and I can pretty much guarantee my farmers will be—then they most certainly will look at funding. I am very concerned as to where the funding will come from in a very economically restricted budget, particularly the budget of next year when we are going to see higher unemployment and the repayment of debt having to take place. The Productivity Commission’s inquiry into government drought support report confirmed the information in the budget that the government has chosen to abandon support for our drought-stricken farmers.

Recommendations made by the Productivity Commission include: terminating the Drought Exceptional Circumstances (EC)
Interest Rate Subsidies and Income Support by 2010 irrespective of seasonal conditions and terminating the EC declaration process—with no new areas, full or interim to be declared—and with current declarations ceasing by 30 June 2010. The Productivity Commission also slams support to small business in drought EC regions, stating that it too should be terminated.

Many of the statements and assertions made in the report have shocked me greatly. For example, it is simply unbelievable to read, on page 25 of the overview:

… during 2007-08, nearly half of Australia’s dairy and broadacre farms in drought-declared areas did manage without EC assistance. Over the six years to 2007-08, on average nearly 70 per cent of these farms managed without EC assistance.

What an absurd statement! The commissioner’s choice of language is disgusting and disgraceful. It offends me enormously. The fact is that these farms did not manage without assistance—they simply were not eligible. Many of them were on their hands and knees trying to make ends meet, calling out for some assistance and to be included. They were altering their farming and business practices in so many ways just so they could get groceries on the table. In my electorate, Rotary clubs, Lions clubs and many other clubs came into my electorate office with pantry packs. We would take bags out to the halls and they would be distributed to proud families who were reduced to accepting food packs.

We call these farmers ‘managing’? I find that extraordinary and the inference that these farmers did not need assistance could not be any further from the truth, because they needed assistance but they just simply did not get it. They have been battling for so long. I might add—because I have to be fair about this—that was under the rules of the past government as well. It could always have been changed. It could have been changed in the last two years. When the rules were put in place nobody would have expected that this unrelenting drought could go on for so long for these people.

I feel that if we had a sympathetic government, I know we would have changed those rules—recognising those amazing challenges that these people were confronting. I cannot understand how the Productivity Commission did not find evidence that farmers’ access to capital differed from other businesses during periods of drought. I do not understand why there is no acknowledgement or recognition out there of how many farmers are simply on the breadline, how many farmers are just surviving on a day-to-day basis and how many of them cannot get access to further finance from the banks and are now being told that they really should consider leaving their properties.

Most definitely, I was even told that by companies who were underpinning finances for my grain growers. They said that they were going to come through my electorate and advise farmers that they would not be affording the company’s facilities to them anymore and that they had to make the decision to get off the land. That is a tragic case for people who, under normal circumstances, are easily able not only to make a living for themselves and their communities but also to contribute to the GDP of this nation and to provide food for the world and Australia.

It is just an incredible experience to have been in this position for so long. We see farmers who have adopted best practice management over the years, who have implemented climate change initiatives and who have provided variability practices getting absolutely no recognition for the movement and the advances that they have made. In my irrigation areas they have modernised their systems and not once does the minister,
Penny Wong, recognise all of the hard yards, work and gains that have been made. It is always ground zero—as if we have raped and pillaged the land, flood irrigated forever and never put in an infrastructure improvement. That is so not true. That is unfair for the people to be judged in that manner. The farmers that we represent are leading the world in their research and development. They are adopting advances in agriculture faster than most other farmers in the developed world. And yet they feel constantly as though they are being victimised by a government that is now beginning to look as though it does not value the importance of food security and farmers.

I say that quite confidently now, because I am everyday becoming more and more offended in question time and when ministerial statements are being made and there are smart points being made against the Nationals by referring to us as ‘cockies corner’. The people whom I represent are offended by this, because they believe it is an absolutely demeaning remark for all of those farmers and producers across this nation who work their hands to the bone in order to produce. They get relegated to being represented by us Nationals here in cockies corner. How demeaning. And I am surprised that even people of the calibre that make the ministerial front bench, including the Prime Minister today, refer to cockies corner. I think it is an absolute insult to each and every one of us here and to each of the people that I represent in my rural and regional area.

That is what is being inferred here—the member for Parkes summed it up really well: that our growers are somehow, in some way, so inferior, so idiotic and so stupid that they have to be taught how to put in place things that they lead the world in. It is an embarrassment and an absolute indictment. That is why I have now come to realise exactly how those people whom I represent are viewed by the government. Increasingly there is the walk to the dispatch box, calling this ‘cockies corner’, and knowing it is intended to insult us and every person that we represent in the farming fraternity. I object to that. Thankfully, there are so many things that one could talk about here in this House. The food and fibre producers are the only sector that experienced four quarters of positive growth last year. That seems to dispel the fact that they are all so stupid and idiotic.

The current drought is like no other we have ever experienced. The majority of my electorate of Riverina has now been drought declared for seven years running. It is not a one-in-25-year drought; it is now a one-in-100-year drought. Not even the best farmers could have prepared for this. I am extremely worried about the farmers that I represent but also about the communities that are reliant on agriculture. Apart from the city of Wagga Wagga, which is underpinned by the RAAF base, Kapooka Army base and Charles Sturt University, every single community that I represent, even that great metropolitan and cosmopolitan community of Griffith, is reliant on agriculture. Every single farm, every single producer and every single business that is providing employment into every other town except for Wagga Wagga is reliant on agriculture.

The Riverina has historically been home to a diverse range of agricultural products and they have been enjoyed right across Australia and exported throughout the world with the most amazing success. The sheer diversity of the Riverina has allowed for a wide range of agricultural pursuits. Today is a typical example of the resilience of these communities. Today heralds the one-year anniversary of the demolition of the single desk for the wheat growers that I represent across my region. Today we had around 60 of our growers come here outside Parliament House to decry the demolition of the single
The people who made up the majority of the farming families who came in here today were young. There were little children in strollers and prams, and young mums. They were not the 80- or 90-year-old broken down old cockies that we seem to get referred to as. They were young aspirational farmers who have had their dreams and aspirations damaged beyond repair because they are grain growers. They have had a shocking season under the new rules.

Under the rules, these growers have been totally demolished. They have had port delays. They have had 16-hour delays with their trucks. Traders do not pay for those 16-hour delays. I can table articles that will attest to what I am saying here about the trials that my growers from the Riverina have been facing. I raise these issues time and time again in this House and in every other place that I can in defence of the growers and how these rules will impact on them in such an extraordinary and most disproportionate way.

The growers here today told of their losses as a result of there being no pool, no storage, inadequate arrangements for a functioning port system, transport costs and the long waiting times at the port. As I have said, in many cases they are waiting for over 16 hours, and it is all at their cost.

The minister has said that they can store their grain on-farm. They can store their grain until somebody magically comes along and offers them a price after all of the tenders are full. I ask: what are they supposed to live on in the meantime? Also, they will have to try and work out how they are going to store the grain, because we do not have grain storage facilities. Further, the minister must be aware by now of all the problems associated with fungal and insect damage to grain in storage circumstances. I stood in this House saying, ‘There is not enough storage on this land to provide a convincing way for growers to get out of the situation that they have been left in’—and that is the demolition of the single desk and no pooling. I would not be holding my breath while I store my grain and wait for some trader to come along and give me a price that I am entitled to. No. My growers will be trod on and screwed into the ground as a result of this sheer act of bastardry against them. I feel very, very strongly about this.

Today, I heard the member for Moreton calling across the chamber, alluding to the fact that we are not a united team, that we are all over the place and that some of my colleagues had crossed the floor on a bill while others had abstained. I ask Labor members: ‘Where are you on issues that affect your electorates?’ You will never see a Labor member cross over and be a part of the issues or vote against issues that affect the people that they represent because, if they did, they know that they would be disendorsed. They have not the courage to do it. I am saying this because I find it a cowardly attack by the member to continually call across the chamber when some of us have had the courage to stand up and have gone through the gut-wrenching experience of being counted on issues for the people that we represent.

Where are the Labor members on the job losses with the CPRS? I note that the member for Flynn is in the chamber. Where is the modelling? Where is the member for Flynn on the question of job losses or the modelling for the scheme? Does he even ask, ‘Can we have modelling to see how this scheme will impact on the people who make up the electorate of Flynn?’ You never hear a word. But you do hear the catcalling all the time coming from across the chamber about how the Nationals are in such disarray and how
we cannot get our act together. Do you know what? Our act is together. My act is together. My act is about standing here and taking responsibility, whether I am in a government seat or in an opposition seat. It is about making choices and taking the pathway that represents the people that I am supposed to represent in here. So do not play those sanctimonious games across the chamber with me anymore. Hang your heads in shame. I am tired of this catcalling across this chamber about the way in which the Nationals represent their constituencies. I am proud to be a National and proud to represent the issues that come before this place whether I am in government or in opposition.

I also want to speak about the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. The fact is that there are issues about the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that concern many members of the opposition. I just cannot understand why we are not hearing about them in the public domain. We most certainly hear about them in the private domain. But I cannot understand why we are not hearing about them from government members who know that their electorates will be affected by the scheme and who know that they are going to lose jobs because of it. Why are they not screaming: ‘How are we going to ameliorate and prevent this? What action can we take to ensure that people living in rural and regional Australia are not disproportionately affected by the CPRS that the Labor Party currently have before the House?’ Indeed, there is an issue for each and every one of us to confront, and I am very pleased that the government has actually moved to delay this scheme for 15 months, because maybe that will give people some time to get up some courage to ask the tough questions and to represent their constituents on the tough issues.

Moving back to the issue at hand, the NRAC, I am hopeful that when we see the changes made in the make-up of NRAC we will also see some thought, concern and care about the wellbeing of people who choose to live and work in rural and regional Australia. Mr Deputy Speaker, there is no-one more worthy of support from the parliament than the people in these areas because of the enormous benefits that they provide with their produce to the people of Australia. I could go on for a significant amount of time raising—(Time expired)

Dr STONE (Murray) (6.29 pm)—I rise to speak on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009. This bill provides for members of the National Rural Advisory Council—or NRAC, as it is commonly called—to be re-appointed twice after the expiry of their initial term. This will permit a member of NRAC to serve a maximum term of nine years. It will ensure that National Rural Advisory Council members who have acquired expertise—for example, in undertaking exceptional circumstances assessments for drought ravaged areas—can continue to make a sound contribution to NRAC. The National Rural Advisory Council was established under the former coalition government in 1999, replacing the Rural Adjustment Scheme Advisory Council, and it was then given a wider brief. The members of NRAC are supposed to be chosen for their independence and knowledge of rural issues. They are supposed to use their skills to provide advice to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on rural issues, including the determination of areas to receive drought support or to have that support rolled over.

There has never been such a time of need for strong and independent advice for any government than now, because this Rudd Labor government has turned its back on agriculture and rural communities in Australia. It is hard to work out quite why—whether it is due to ignorance, because...
members of the Labor Party typically have no experience beyond metropolitan Australia, or due to their awareness that most of the political allegiance in rural and regional communities is with the coalition and therefore Labor is disinterested in any behaviour, activities or resource allocation that is going to support those who vote elsewhere. We have seen the extraordinary business in recent times where, unless you are a gift-giver to the Prime Minister, for example, you cannot expect to capture his attention—and certainly not the attention of the Treasury or the Treasurer.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke, has failed us absolutely. This day has been spent calling for the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Leader of the Opposition and assorted others to resign. I actually call on the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to resign. He has failed absolutely to address the drought crisis in most of southern Australia and Tasmania. He has also failed to address the crises in other agribusiness sectors due to the costs of production and the failure of this government to properly address emissions trading schemes and incorporate agriculture other than as an additional cost-taker. This government has absolutely failed to understand the needs of research and development and has systematically abolished those organisations who have been doing that work—in some cases for many decades—to assist the agricultural community. How can this minister have stood by when I, amongst many others, went and begged him to address the crisis currently affecting the export exposed dairy industry? We have a world-best dairy industry. Along with the rest of the domestic milk suppliers, it employs some 40,000 people in this country. The industry is worth some $40 billion. It is on its knees because the prices being paid to the milk producers and manufacturers are below the costs of production. In our export markets we are now competing with highly subsidised product from the EU and the USA.

The minister listened politely and has done absolutely nothing. Meanwhile, we looked on as the automotive sector received billions of dollars of support before Christmas last year and as the retail sector received billions of dollars of support. Every man and his dog has $900 in their pocket to go and buy a new television. The dairy sector only need perhaps 18 months of support to keep them going—it has been costed at about $73 million—until hopefully prices come back, but this industry has been totally and cynically ignored. Murray Goulburn, our biggest co-operative and the only Australian owned dairy company left, has begged to have a place in front of Penny Wong, the Minister for Climate Change and Water, to tell her about the problems that this government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme will force them to deal with if the government does not change its ETS arrangements. They cannot get an audience with Minister Wong. That is shameful. When I myself spoke to Minister Wong about the problems in the dairy sector I was told by her and her advisor: ‘Well, they’re irrigators, aren’t they? That is a problem.’ Let me assure this government that irrigated agriculture in Australia is amongst the most efficient in the world. No-one wastes water when you are paying for a 100 per cent entitlement and getting a 30 per cent allocation. No-one wastes water when it costs you hundreds of thousands of dollars to improve the on-farm water use efficiency assistance for your property because this government refuses to do a thing.

What did Penny Wong, the minister for water, the ETS and assorted other things, and Tim Fisher, her advisor, say to me when I put before her the extraordinary problems of the dairy industry and the fact that they needed to seriously consider on-farm water use effi-
ciency and the ETS? She said, ‘Well, you know, we have got a good exit package.’ In other words, she was saying, ‘Get out of the industry; we are not interested in your future’—the future that would employ some 40,000 people and would be worth $40 billion in export earnings. It was a matter of saying: ‘Get out, we think we have got a decent exit package.’ Let me just say as well that the exit package is not what it is cracked up to be either.

Why should an enterprise like dairying be driven out of business because of government policy? This is extraordinary. It is not the drought killing the dairy industry. It is not yet the ETS, because it is yet to be introduced in this country. It is government policy which is killing off an export industry which over generations has brought wealth to southern Australia, to parts of Western Australia and to Tasmania. It is wealth that has multiplied in the manufacturing sector and the transport sector and for workers in metropolitan Australia. I think it is disgusting the way Minister Tony Burke comes into this chamber day after day and tells us how he has triumphed over some other sector and made them a showpiece when all the while he knows a sector like the dairy industry is going to the wall.

How can members of this government lie in bed at night knowing that their so-called ‘award modernisation’ activity is going to drive horticulture out of business? Horticulturalists need flexibility in the management of their workforces. Their products, their crops, their tomatoes, their strawberries and their soft fruits need to be picked when it is optimal for that product to be picked. They cannot wait for the following weekday or, indeed, sometimes during the day. The new award modernisation proposal for horticulture demands double time for any hours worked over the weekend, whether it is shed work or picking work. The proposal says that workers cannot work between 6 am and 6 pm without accruing penalties, even if they are within their overall work week time frame. The proposal says that they must be paid for a minimum of four hours and they must be paid a minimum salary, not on piecework. So that is the end of the slow worker being able to start and develop a career in horticulture as a picker, pruner and packer. They will simply not be taken on because horticulturalists will not be able to afford it.

What other developed government, parliamentary democracy, would inflict this sort of award on a sector that cannot pass on prices because it is exposed to the duopoly of Coles and Woolworths, who will not pay a cent more than they can possibly get away with because there is the import option always in front of them? ‘You don’t want to supply your strawberries at next to nothing? Then we’ll bring them in from somewhere else. There’s a queue behind you—’ that is the way they tackle it. I say to this government, ‘How can you stand by and inflict the horticulture award modernisation strategy on the Australian horticultural industry and imagine that you are behaving in a responsible fashion?’ This is a most disgraceful piece of business and I cannot imagine how Julia Gillard, the minister responsible for this work, can lie straight in bed at night knowing that the horticultural industry’s demise will be on her head.

Then we move onto something like faster broadband. Everyone understands and appreciates that telecommunications and broadband in particular are moving and developing at a rapid rate, and Australia must be world best. We must be able to have our industries, whether they are located in Brunswick or Broadmeadows or Mooroopna, able to access systems of telecommunications or broadband that are equal in speed and efficiency of use and cost. After all, Mooroopna
is only two hours from Melbourne. But let me tell you, the problem is that this government has declared that, if you are in a town with fewer than 1,000 people, the policy does not apply. You do not get access to the $43 billion broadband rollout. You will pay for it through your taxes, of course, but if you are in a town with fewer than 1,000 people you do not expect to see anything happen in your part of the world. You are out of sight, out of mind.

Lest someone listening thinks those towns with fewer than 1,000 people are all out the back of Uluru or Bourke or Katherine, let me tell you that in my electorate of Murray, which is between two and four hours from Melbourne, we have more than 30 towns with fewer than 1,000 people in them. The entire shire of Loddon has not a single town with more than 1,000 people. Campaspe shire only has a couple of towns with more than 1,000 people. So how can a democratically elected government, which should be governing for all people—a statement Mr Rudd made, obviously with his fingers crossed behind his back. He made that statement at one stage; he was going to govern for all Australians. If so, how come this broadband policy is only for people in towns of more than 1,000 people? Doesn’t he understand the settlement patterns of this great country? He clearly does not.

And then we get to the cynical abuse of the opportunities of young rural and regional Australians to go to university. Can you imagine the shock of that announcement for all of those young Australians who had earned a place and an offer to go to university and who are in their gap year now, as we speak? Can you imagine their shock when they realised that this government has now made it impossible for them to take up those places? That is because Minister Gillard—the Minister for Education among many other things—has said that they will now have to work for 30 hours per week for 18 months out of two years, or 24 months, in order to qualify for the independent youth allowance, which is essential for most rural and regional students whose parents do not have the $20,000 or so extra needed to pay for their living away from home expenses.

You would have thought that Minister Gillard would have taken into account those in their gap year right now and would have had some sort of grandfathering strategy or clause, like most responsible ministers in government. But, no, she had forgotten about these people—about 30,000 of them. When we phoned her office on the night of the announcement of the changed conditions for Youth Allowance, we said: ‘What about those rural and regional students in their gap year right now who can’t go to university while living at home with mum in Toorak or the North Shore of Sydney? They live hours away from university.’ Her office said: ‘Oh, we’ll have to get back to you. We’re not sure about those. We haven’t quite got to them yet.’

It is months later now. There have been protest rallies right across Australia, particularly in places like Bendigo and Ballarat, with students saying: ‘What about us? Can’t we now train as professionals—as doctors, dentists, teachers, nurses, engineers? We have earned a place in university, but your new rules cut us out.’ Minister Gillard has come back and said: ‘Look’—and she says this regularly with a smile on her face at question time—‘you’re lying. You’re not looking at the means test and how we’ve changed it. More people will be eligible due to our means test changes.’ However, if you get out the taper rates from Centrelink and have a look at them, you will see in fact that, while the means test rates have indeed changed, you are only looking at a few dollars a week difference—a few dollars a week into your pocket when you are still so-called
‘eligible’ for Youth Allowance at the higher cut-off rates. We are told, ‘Don’t worry; you can be independent at the age of 22 now.’ Most students leave school at 17 or 18, and if they have to wait until they are 22 to access their university of education, because that is when they will be eligible for independent youth allowance, then it is probably too late. They will have to apply as a mature age student, for which there are fewer places.

This is one of the most cynical, shortsighted and devastating decisions this government has made in denying rural and regional youth an opportunity for university education into the future. We know that people born and bred in a country area who then train as a doctor, dentist, nurse or teacher are likely to return to practise in these professions as qualified adults. So this government is removing generations of rural and regional professionals who would have served our needs in a skill-short Australia.

This is a disgraceful piece of policymaking. It was presumably done on the run on the back of an envelope. The minister quite clearly has too many portfolio areas to get across. She has made a mess of the industrial relations scene. I have mentioned horticulture—that is just one area on its knees; you could add to that the retail sector. The tourism and hospitality sectors have equally been dismayed and distressed to find their viability affected by Minister Gillard’s extraordinary lack of grasp of what really needs to happen in this country. Then there are the changes to youth allowance, which is a devastating situation.

Let me get to perhaps the worst situation of all: water policy. Minister Wong clearly does not understand that, in a drought stressed country—in my part of the world, we have had drought for seven years now—saying that the government will provide $1 billion, $2 billion or $3 billion to buy back water from willing sellers is quite simply the most cynical and cruel joke to play. You have people who certainly must sell their water. The banks and other lenders are leaning on them very hard. But that water should be sold back into the irrigation communities, which can continue to produce food for this nation and for export. Penny Wong—with the full understanding and permission of Prime Minister Rudd, I suppose—has put irrigated agriculture in this country right throughout the Murray-Darling Basin at risk, and she has not delivered a single extra megalitre to the environment through this extraordinarily short-sighted policy.

The pipeline to Melbourne is a classic and typical example of what the Labor governments, both state and federal, are doing to an irrigated, food-producing sector which was once called the ‘food bowl of Australia’. I am talking about northern Victoria, of course: the area which straddles the electorates of McEwen, Indi, Murray and Mallee. The pipeline to Melbourne has now been thoroughly exposed as not being based on any business case. The general manager of the government’s Office of Water, David Downie, now says that factors such as expected flows, water quality and rainfall predictions for the pipeline and irrigation projects have undergone ‘substantial changes’ since April last year. That is wrong. No, the factors have not changed; they have simply always been based on wrong calculations by the Bracks and Brumby governments.

The Victorian government, however, is refusing to release the documents which describe exactly how much water it is going to take out of the Murray-Darling Basin and the Goulburn system to push down the north-south pipeline. The Victorian government is refusing to release those documents because it says they are only a snapshot, they were prepared by junior staff and they ‘do not contain sufficient information for an uninformed
audience to interpret them correctly and reasonably’. What an insult. In other words, northern Victorians whose water is to be taken out of the Eildon dam, which is now at less than 12 per cent of its capacity, are ignorant and stupid and cannot comprehend the facts about what the Victorian government, in collusion with the federal government, intends to do with irrigated agriculture.

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett, has an EPBC controlled action over the north-south pipeline. He is refusing to step up to the plate and tell Premier Brumby that what he is doing with the pipeline is wrong. Seventy-five gigalitres of water, which includes environmental reserve water out of Eildon and water already paid for and accounted for through the Living Murray and Water for Rivers funding, is to be taken and there has been no independent audit of the water savings from the Food Bowl Modernisation Project. Premier Brumby is ignoring all of those facts and factors. Minister Garrett refuses to rap Premier Brumby over the knuckles and say, ‘Stop.’ The pipeline is an absolute travesty. There is no water to put down it. It is going to cost taxpayers nearly $1 billion and provide no more water for Melbourne. This is an example of what this government is doing to irrigated and ordinary agriculture. It is a disgrace. (Time expired)

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (6.49 pm)—Given that the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009 proposes to amend the maximum length of service for a member of the National Rural Advisory Council, it is a great opportunity for me to acknowledge from the outset the great contribution that farmers and their families make to the economy, both domestic and export, and to conservation and innovation in this country. I have seen some amazing examples in my electorate of farmers who have made a great contribution to conservation and to restoring some of the land in Western Australia that has been badly affected by salt and is no longer productive. In many cases, farmers have poured thousands of dollars of their own money into dealing with these problems successfully and ensuring that their land is more productive but also that the local ecology is better off for that contribution. In terms of innovation, I think we have some of the most innovative farmers in the world. We should certainly all acknowledge in this place the importance of farmers and their contribution to food production and food security.

I would like to acknowledge some of the very eloquent contributions of some of my colleagues today. It is notable that there have not been contributions from speakers on the other side. The member for Riverina mentioned comments coming from ministers on the other side about our National Party colleagues and particularly those of us who represent farming communities. I would have to say I agree. We are here to represent people out there who contribute to the building of this country, to its economy, to its communities and to its ecology. Some of these people have done it very hard. While the minister stands over there and makes trivial comments and asks trivial questions about anything other than issues to do with agriculture, there are people out in the rural communities of Australia who are genuinely hurting, genuinely making sacrifices and doing it tough. I think we could see a little bit more interest from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in looking after the farming sector, because that is his job, rather than trivialising those opportunities in this place to raise matters of serious import.

I will go back for a moment to just talk about the efficiency and innovation of farmers in Australia and particularly in my electorate of Pearce. Quite a large slab of my electorate is involved in productive agriculture. I saw over the years that farmers were
the first to suffer in this country but they were also the first to innovate and recover during the economic changes that we made in the early nineties. Not all of them recovered, but a good many of them learned to innovate and become very efficient as they faced fairly savage tariff reductions. I am not saying that these decisions were not right decisions at the time, but I sometimes feel that systems were not put in place to cushion some of the worst blows that were sustained by agriculture when we removed the tariff barriers and floated the Australian dollar. It did cause a lot of pain out in rural electorates.

Despite all of that, we have seen some of the most efficient farming practices in the world—without subsidies. There are very few subsidies provided to the farming communities today. They are very efficient. They have done this in the face of massive cost increases and cost pressures. As you would know, Deputy Speaker Washer, having an interest in horticulture, in these last few years farmers have faced increased cost pressures in the cost of petrol, which flows into the cost of chemicals and the cost of fertilisers. Of course, the rise in the value of the Australian dollar, although it helps many sectors of the community, does not actually help our farmers who are exporting. That is quite difficult at times for them to manage.

In a speech I gave to the House just a short while ago, in May, on the appropriation bills I commented that, in the face of the uncertainty:

… perhaps it is timely that we share with the government the lessons that have been learnt by farming communities over many lifetimes on how to deal with the climate of uncertainty. After all, the agricultural sector is the only one to record growth in recent times. In the September quarter national GDP went up one per cent, yet farm GDP went up 14.9 per cent. Similarly in the December quarter, which was the country’s first quarter of negative growth in national GDP, national GDP went down by 0.5 per cent, and by contrast farm GDP increased by 10.8 per cent.

Primary producers have held their own under economic conditions that would literally floor most people. Drought, fire, flood, currency fluctuations, steeply rising costs of fuel, fertiliser and chemicals, and the global financial crisis have failed to dampen the enthusiasm and the determination of this— the farming— sector. They just work harder, smarter and longer to achieve results.

As I said in that speech:

As I move around the rural and regional areas of the electorate of Pearce, I am reminded of the most important lesson that we can learn from the farming community: they know to call a spade a spade; and they know to call the drought a drought and not a temporary reduction in localised precipitation.

It is an important thing that they do know that; otherwise, they would not be in business

To move on to the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009 that we are debating, currently the NRAC members can only be reappointed once, so the maximum time they can serve is six years. This will change so that members may be reappointed twice and hence serve for a maximum of nine years.

The significance of this change comes from the importance of the NRAC in the process of delivering assistance to farmers coping with crisis conditions—and there have been plenty of those, as I said. These are natural crises in this case. The NRAC has been operating for nearly 10 years as an advisory body to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. It has always been important that there is a strong link between the decisions made here in Canberra and what happens out there in rural Australia. The NRAC have been invaluable in this association, but they need to understand the realities
of rural living in recent times, with farmers being placed under the very real pressure of an increasingly unforgiving and, may I say, malevolent environment.

Having grown up in the small country town of Narrogin, south-east of Perth, I know firsthand of every farmer’s perennial concern about the weather. Their livelihoods and the environment are inextricably linked for better or for worse. I represent the seat of Pearce into which Narrogin falls, and much of Pearce of course is agricultural land. I am again reminded of the ever-present anxiety about the climate. But today’s farmers need to contend with not just the odd year of light rain but, as I said, a malevolent climate which has left them year after year falling short. So it is important that we have an experienced team on the National Rural Advisory Council and that we are able to ensure that people can serve there perhaps for a little longer than they would under the current provisions.

The decisions that the council makes are of course in relation to exceptional circumstances funding. Exceptional circumstances have been defined as ‘rare and severe events outside those a farmer could normally be expected to manage using responsible farm management strategies’. The result of these circumstances must be ‘a severe downturn in farm income’ for a protracted period—that is, for more than 12 months. When a declaration of exceptional circumstances has been made, farmers and small businesses dependent on agriculture will have access to exceptional circumstances relief payments.

I want to make a comment about this whole process of exceptional circumstances relief payments. As a new member of this place and the then shadow minister for small business—which I think, in a sense, covered farming, because farming is sometimes big business but a lot of it is relatively small business—I did a trip through northern New South Wales, where all of the little towns such as Walcha, Coraki and Tenterfield had been in the grip of drought for four years. And the government, I felt, was extremely slow to respond. That trip is etched deeply into my mind, my heart and my soul, because what I encountered on that trip, in the many meetings we had in those small communities, was incredible heartache and pain. Often people do not understand that, when the farmers go down, so does the supporting community around them. In those little towns, the loss of one family or perhaps the closure of the school and the loss of the schoolteachers and their families can be an absolute disaster for the rest of the town. The little store that provides a few groceries, the newsagent, the bank—suddenly they all begin to tumble and close because they cannot be supported any longer.

I saw tough men who for decades had provided for their families break down in tears in town hall meetings. And I know these kinds of people; they do not break down very easily; they are tough. What really gripped me was the fact that on many occasions people told me that they had to put down even their breeding herds. It had taken them years and years to build up their breeding herds, but they had to put them down because they simply had no feed to sustain them; they had been handfeeding for a long time. I remember in Casino, I think it was, if my memory serves me right, talking to the farm women. They told me the women in the town had set up a scheme where the women on the farms could go once a week to take a shower and do the family washing, so difficult were those times. We met under trees, we met in town halls, and as long as I live I will never forget it.

As a new, green member of parliament I came back here so deeply moved by this that I started investigating how we might address
Drought is a fact of life in Australia, just like floods and fires and frosts, and yet we treat it so differently. We are so slow to respond. And the EC system is cumbersome, it is complex, it is means tested, and you have really got to be almost at the end of the line before you can get help. We need to have some kind of drought relief system that allows farmers to continue to farm, to keep the breeding herds—not wait until there is nothing left before the drought relief kicks in.

You might remember, Mr Deputy Speaker Washer, as others would, when Ray Martin started up the Farmhand appeal. It was designed to get donations to help sustain these families and, I am sorry to say, it actually shamed the government into doing something; they were not going to do anything. It so engaged the Australian public that the government were forced to make drought relief available.

So I would like to see us re-examine how we deal with exceptional circumstances assistance, how we provide drought relief—understanding that, as some of the effects of climate change kick in, we are probably going to see these kinds of disasters more often than we would like. I think we need to have a dialogue about this and have a serious think about how we can deliver better relief to farmers.

There has been a lot of talk in Western Australia about how we might better manage disasters, and one of the schemes that have often been talked about to me by some of my farmers is multiperil crop insurance. In fact, Derek Clauson, who is the grains section president of the WA Farmers Federation, has also spoken on this. He highlighted the fact that this would be high on the WAFarmers agenda in 2009, and a WAFarmers lobbying group was set up to intensify efforts to get this up after frost hit WA very hard last year in September. It decimated crops in the southern and south-eastern wheat belt after causing severe head and stem damage to the grain crops. So this has been much talked about over the years.

When you consider that the federal government chipped in $1.2 billion in drought related relief to farm households between July 2001 and June 2008, and another $1.8 billion was provided to farm businesses and rural small businesses—which was one of the changes that we made when we were in government, to make sure we included small farm businesses and rural businesses, like machinery dealerships and so on, to make sure that fabric was not lost—it would make sense perhaps to consider rolling this money into a multiperil crop insurance scheme. It has been discussed in this place before. In fact, my colleague the member for O’Connor has had quite a bit to say on it. He gave a presentation not so long ago, and I would like to acknowledge the work that he has done on this particular issue. In his presentation, he listed under ‘Basic principles’:

*To create an insurance product to allow growers to insure their cost of production at the beginning of each season*

This would be a very good step. He also said:

*EC is a Government grant and as such is complex—*

and I agree with him on that—

*and means tested which frequently excludes growers simply on the basis of property value or off farm investments*

As I said, it does not give farmers much real control. They are on the bones of their backside, on their knees, by the time they get the current assistance. The member for O’Connor said:

*This product—multiperil crop insurance—*

would be available to all who choose to use it and the subsidy would not be means tested.
Those who did not purchase the product would be deemed to self-insure and therefore be ineligible for Government assistance.

I think multiperil crop insurance is worthy of consideration. Indeed, many other countries, such as Canada, the United States and Italy, have multiperil crop insurance. It is a process that would allow growers to better manage their own risk and give them better control over the future of their farms in exceptional circumstances.

I notice that there has been a Productivity Commission inquiry into government drought support, the report of which was released last month. They have made several recommendations to extensively alter the operation of EC relief payments. Clearly, further investigations will need to be made but I hope that the minister makes sure that in any new design as to exceptional circumstances money the government will make sure that the rural communities are properly consulted with, because this is a very, very important matter. As I said, with growing risks of climate changes and adverse climate episodes, this is going to become a more frequent encounter and I think we have a duty in this parliament to make sure that we have a scheme in place that is workable and allows our national farmers to manage their own businesses. (Time expired)

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (7.09 pm)—I congratulate the member for Pearce for her thoughtful contribution on and insights into this issue. It is with pleasure that I join the debate on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009. The bill removes the current provision that a person may be reappointed on one occasion only to the National Rural Advisory Council, or NRAC. As all regional MPs would be aware, particularly those of the many drought affected electorates, NRAC’s main role is to provide advice on regional issues, particularly in relation to the assessment of areas for drought exceptional circumstances support. This bill will allow for NRAC members to serve an additional term in the future, and I can understand the government’s reason for moving in that direction.

This evening I want to make some general observations about my involvement with drought and NRAC as it relates to the Gippsland community. One of my first experiences upon entering federal politics a year ago came about through the need to strongly represent the interests of my community as a result of a decision made by NRAC. On 19 August last year, without warning and without any explanation, I received a phone call from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry’s office explaining to me that EC assistance for the Gippsland region would not be extended beyond 30 September 2008. While I appreciate the effort by the minister’s office to make that contact with me, it did strike me as a bizarre decision at the time. I quickly informed the staff member that I thought a mistake had been made. In fact, I think the term I used was that I thought they had ‘made a blue’. It set off a chain of events in the Gippsland electorate and I ended up writing to the minister on more than 30 occasions representing the interests of individual landholders. At the time, the minister accused me of playing politics with this particular issue, but nothing could have been further from the truth. I accept that the minister does not know me that well, but there was never any intention on my part to play politics with the lives of my constituents on such a serious issue.

NRAC had actually let down my farmers. The farmers were reporting conditions that were worse than in the previous year, for which they were in receipt of EC funding and support. There was a complete erosion of confidence in the community as their cash reserves had been exhausted and many people were doubting their future and the future
of their children on the land. In particular, taking over the family farm was in jeopardy. The decision to withdraw EC funding at that particular time was the final straw for many of them. They had long suspected that there were some city based MPs—dare I say it, on both sides of the House—who really could not care about the plight of the farming sector, and for them this decision confirmed it. In my short time in this place it is one of the most difficult jobs I have had to undertake.

I listened carefully to the insightful contribution on this bill of the member for Riverina. The passion that she exhibited over the emotional impact of the drought on her electorate was obvious in her speech to the House this evening. It was an exceptional contribution by an exceptional local member. Just like the member for Riverina, I found the emotional toll of trying to assist my drought affected farmers to be quite draining, but it was nothing in comparison to the turmoil that they were going through. It was made worse by the decision of NRAC and the minister to endorse a particular decision at the time. The uncertainty it created was terrible: visiting these drought affected farmers to be quite draining, but it was nothing in comparison to the turmoil that they were going through. It was made worse by the decision of NRAC and the minister to endorse a particular decision at the time. The uncertainty it created was terrible: visiting these drought affected farmers and telling them that, yes, their EC funding had been withdrawn and that we were fighting for it to be restored, but we had no idea whether we would bring the government to its senses in the future. The mood in the community was stressed to say the very least. The ‘we’ I refer to is my electorate staff, who did a magnificent job to assist in the campaign that we were running at the time, and my local farmers, who also rallied to assist us.

Quite apart from the obvious economic impacts, droughts are insidious to the soul as they sap away the energy and enthusiasm of our communities and corrode, I believe, the hopes of the next generation. You see—and the member for Pearce referred to this as well—our big, strong farmers reduced emotionally through the strain of having to put down stock or of having to constantly ‘feed out’ stock, when they are in a position to be able to afford to do so. The constant drain of dealing with these droughts is emotionally gruelling for everyone in those communities.

The decision to withdraw EC funding in Gippsland was made after a desktop analysis by NRAC. There was no visit to Gippsland at the time, no attempt to assess the circumstances on the ground and no effort to listen to the locals. I am no farmer and I do not pretend at all to be an expert on agricultural affairs or practical land management issues, but blind Freddy could tell that the farmers in my electorate were facing extraordinarily difficult conditions. These were exceptional circumstances in every sense of the words. In particular, the Tambo Valley from Bruthen to Benambra and beyond was suffering enormously, and conditions in the Buchan Valley were little better. Right across Gippsland there were tales of farming families doing it very tough. There were dams and creek beds that had never run dry in the living memory of the several generations of families who had experience of farming on that land, and they were faced with a water crisis. It was an extremely difficult situation. In many instances now the conditions in parts of Gippsland have actually improved. I am happy to report that to the House. But the recovery does remain patchy and the EC assistance is still needed.

One of the great challenges we face going forward is how we manage the transition from EC to sustainable and viable farms in the future. It is a challenge that exercises my mind and the minds of many others in Gippsland. Many farming families have become dependent on the income support that they receive and the transition from now into the future is going to be very difficult for us. It took considerable time and effort and it placed a lot of stress on farming families to
actually get NRAC to visit Gippsland and recommend an extension of the EC funding. I commend the minister in this case. I know the minister has copped a bit of a hiding here this evening, but I commend the minister and acknowledge that, once he came to appreciate the gravity of the situation in Gippsland, he did respond to representations that were being made to him and he did seek a further on-the-ground assessment of the conditions in Gippsland.

But such is the inefficient system we face at the moment that, even once NRAC had visited Gippsland and a ruling had been made to return the EC provisions, some parts of the region were actually excluded again. We have this bizarre situation where people separated by the width of a road were in very different circumstances in relation to the EC support. There were those who were in and those who were out, just by the 15- or 20-metre separation of a road reserve. I quote from a letter from one of my constituents in Traralgon. The letter was written on 22 January this year, when Latrobe city was actually left out of the EC declaration:

We cannot understand why some farms within the Gippsland region are able to access the EC benefits yet we are not able to even though our area in Gippsland is suffering drought.

The EC declaration seems extremely unfair and inconsistent as we are in just as much need of the financial assistance as are other drought stricken farms in Gippsland that have obviously received rain.

That was typical of the pleas for help that I received from several of my constituents. Some of my farmers were considered to require EC assistance while others were excluded, as I said, just by the width of a road.

There was, however, something of a breakthrough after the Black Saturday bushfires when the interim EC assistance was granted for those affected regions, but we await the NRAC findings on the longer term measures. I commend the minister for taking those steps in the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires. It was already a very stressful time in Gippsland and every effort was made to accommodate the needs of the Latrobe city farmers in the aftermath of that event. I am hopeful that there will be a positive finding to continue support beyond the current interim measures.

It is interesting to note that, on this occasion, NRAC has actually visited the region to make its assessment. I would commend that course of action for future assessments. I do not give this background to particularly chastise the minister or NRAC representatives. In fact, I thank the NRAC board members for their service and willingness to do what I believe is a difficult and largely thankless task. There is no enjoyment to be had in inspecting drought-hit communities. I fully acknowledge the difficulty in managing the EC arrangements going forward. But I do make my comments to highlight some of the failings of the current system, which, while it was changed from time to time by the previous government, still does not meet our needs. The lines-on-the-map methodology of ruling regions in or out of drought assistance has created many problems in Gippsland in just the past 10 months. I accept the need for a better system, but it must be a better system for regional areas, not just better for the government to administer. I take the minister at his word that there are no plans to pull the rug out from under farming families who are currently in receipt of EC assistance measures at the moment.

I also take the opportunity to put the minister on notice. If there are any steps taken to reduce the level of support or otherwise compromise the treatment of Australian farming families, he will face a battle beyond his wildest imagination. Again I refer to the member for Riverina and I invite the minister to view the tape of the member’s contribu-
tion if he has any doubts about the passion with which we in the Nationals will continue to represent the interests of farming families. The member for Riverina may be small in stature, but she is a firebrand in her electorate and she will stand up for the needs of her community and those of all regional Australian families every step of the way. The farming families of Australia deserve our support and I will stand shoulder to shoulder with them and other regional MPs to ensure that assistance is provided in the future when it is needed.

The minister has flagged, in letters to me and in the public domain, that he will be seeking to introduce a new system. I stress that his new system needs to be fair, it needs to be equitable and it must send a message to farming families across our nation that we will not abandon them. The minister has the opportunity to send that message to farming families—that this parliament and all who sit in this place will not abandon the farmers of Australia. We need to send that message loudly and we need to send it clearly. Our farmers need to know that this parliament respects the extraordinary contribution they have made to our nation’s development and will continue to make to our nation’s prosperity in the future.

Australian farmers are world-class producers and they are selling their products into a corrupted world market. In many cases, there is no level playing field, but Australian farmers are consistently the best on the ground. If there were a Brownlow Medal for excellence in agricultural production, it would be awarded to the Australian farming sector year after year. Gippsland farmers are at the forefront, with world-class wool producers, dairy farmers, beef farmers, horticulturalists, timber producers and many more. All of these people are doing an extraordinary job in our community. The member for Murray referred to the impact on the dairy industry of the corrupted world markets and the impacts of the government’s proposed emissions trading scheme. I urge the minister to also engage with the dairy industry in Gippsland and beyond as our farmers deal with the current crisis they are facing. Farming families are the backbone of many regional communities and we need to help them prosper not only to protect the food and fibre resources of our nation but to support the social and economic prosperity of communities across Australia.

I have spoken before in the House on this topic. At that time—and again today—I deliberately referred to ‘farming families and their communities’ because when drought hits regional Australia it hits us all, from those on the front line of our nation’s diverse farming enterprises to the many small businesses which supply them; the teachers; the doctors; the health professionals, who often deal with some of the social consequences; and the families themselves. When a drought hits a region, it hits every person within that region. I think the member for Pearce put it beautifully in her speech when she reflected on the impact she saw in one of her early visits as a member of parliament.

Drought is not a matter of ‘odds and evens’ on the watering of the prize roses that it may be in the city. It hits the economic prosperity of the individual families in regional areas, their neighbours and the towns themselves. It has a dramatic effect on the social life of the community. The other often neglected issue of drought is that it affects the environment of the farms themselves and the broader environment of the region. It is for those reasons that there needs to be a long-term commitment to EC declared areas and to support communities like Gippsland as they move into the recovery phase of the drought. As I mentioned earlier, there are signs of recovery in Gippsland, although they are patchy at the moment. It is an old
truism that, when it does rain, it won’t be raining money, or, as the shadow minister put it just the other day, ‘It rains opportunity’. With that opportunity comes the prospect of possibly more debt as the farming sector invests in equipment, in stock and in seed—to take the next gamble, as it were.

It does take time for communities to recover and there will be a lag time in the recovery process. I urge the federal government to work in partnership with state and local government agencies to continue to support communities throughout Australia as they emerge from this drought. There is a direct correlation between the length of years in drought and the community’s capacity to recover. During a drought regional areas suffer as they often lose skilled workers, and many young people move on—literally seeking greener pastures. Governments must invest in the capacity of these regions to help them get back on their feet. Money is needed, as we emerge from drought, for on-farm works such as fencing and basic maintenance along with productivity related investments in improved pastures, which are often neglected during periods when many farmers are suffering from reduced incomes.

Our challenge in the future, when we address this issue of EC funding, is to support viable farming families—to get them over the hump, knowing that on the other side they will prosper. This is not welfare or charity; this is an investment in the future of our nation’s productive farming enterprises. And on that point I urge our farming families in EC areas to seek information on whether they are entitled to receive assistance at the moment. I urge farmers not to self-assess. They should not take the view that it is some form of welfare if they access the income support or interest rate subsidy. I have met with many farming groups in my electorate over the past 12 months and I fear that many individuals are too proud to put their hands up for assistance or do not realise that support is available for them.

It disappoints me that state and federal governments—not just the current governments—are prepared to spend a small fortune on advertising propaganda but fail to inform our farming families about the benefits which they may be able to access when it comes to EC assistance in their areas. I believe there is a place for reasonable government advertising to inform farmers and the accountancy profession that farmers may be entitled to some forms of assistance as they deal with the impact of drought.

I touched previously on the issue of the environment and the impact of droughts. I want to return to the topic because it seems to be a favourite of the minister. He just cannot seem to talk about farming without firstly seeking to discredit the Nationals and secondly referring to climate change. I know the minister is most pleased with himself when he stands at the dispatch box and ridicules the Nationals, but he does a great disservice to the industry which he is meant to represent in this place.

When the minister does engage as to topics—his main focus is always climate change—it is as if he is too scared to talk about agriculture. It is probably some sort of recognition that there are members on this side of the chamber who have forgotten more than he will ever learn about the farming sector. I want to make a few points in that regard because I believe the minister’s obsession with talking about climate change is counterproductive to his relationship with many in the farming sector. At the risk of being seen to give relationship advice, may I suggest to him that he put aside some of his inner-suburban obsessions whenever he moves out into the regional areas.

Through its political approach to the issue of climate change I believe this government
is responsible for dividing Australians on the important issue of sustainable environmental management. By its constant attacks on people who raise any concerns about the current CPRS legislation it is driving a wedge between many regional Australians, who are instinctively uncomfortable with the doomsday scenarios which the Prime Minister likes to propagate.

Farmers and rural landholders are the practical environmentalists of this nation. They have a vested interest in caring for the land and they are keen observers of the weather and longer term climate patterns. Many farmers in my electorate have rainfall records dating back several decades. They know the land and the environment in their locality better than anyone else. They have been taking steps over many years to restore the land to balance. As each bit of research has come along the most successful farmers have learnt more about managing the environment and the productivity of their land.

They have embraced new technology. They have demonstrated their ability to be early adaptors. Throughout history, as they have learnt more they have employed those practices on their land. And their land-use improvements are constantly evolving. That is why any cuts to research funding are such a disaster for agricultural industries.

The feedback I am receiving in Gippsland is that farmers are worried about the long-term drought and they are investigating different techniques and investing in new ways to manage their properties. But they are also telling me that this is nothing new—farmers in Australia have always faced the challenge of growing our nation’s food and fibre in a difficult and variable climate. That is not to say that they do not believe that the climate is changing; it simply makes the point that they are innovative and able to adapt if they are not crushed by the heavy hand of government regulation.

It is in this context that I urge the minister to focus more on the things we must all agree on if we are to achieve positive environmental outcomes, rather than on pursuing a political objective of wedging people on either side of the climate change debate. As I said, farmers are the great practical environmentalists and there is overwhelming support for sustainable environmental practices in my community, both in the context of the long years of drought and of better seasons ahead.

In conclusion, I want to refer briefly to the Productivity Commission’s report on government drought support. And I take up the comments from the shadow minister, who said in this place:

That Productivity Commission report is the most ruthless thing that I have ever seen in any industry in my time …

It is a ruthless report. The recommendations are quite scathing and amount to a complete gutting of the existing support programs. There are recommendations that EC interest rate subsidies should be terminated, EC small business income support should be terminated and EC relief payments should be replaced. All of this is subject to what the report calls ‘transition arrangements’. It does amount to a root-and-branch overhaul of drought policy and it raises many serious issues which bear greater consideration at the appropriate time.

I urge the minister to engage with leaders in the industry before he rushes to implement these recommendations. There are many wiser heads than mine and—dare I say it?—wiser heads than the minister’s when it comes to the practical application of agricultural policy across this nation. And I refer to my earlier comments that there must be a strong message of support to the farming
sector that its contribution to our nation is of value now and will be similarly valued in the future. I thank the House for the opportunity to speak on this bill and associated issues and I wish the NRAC members well in their future deliberations.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (7.28 pm)—I applaud the previous speaker for the sentiments that he put forward in this debate on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009. I wish we had more people here talking like that. But I must give him a tiny educative lesson, of course: it was his own government that did all of these things. Why the ALP keeps attacking the National Party has got me rather curious, because there are only six of them left. The LNP in Queensland is an affiliate body of the Liberal Party. Mr Chester interjecting—

Mr KATTER—No, the three Queensland members are affiliates of the Liberal Party. It is the Liberal National Party of Queensland—the LNP. You can check it out. Ring up the people that determine these things—the Electoral Commission. The tariff subsidy and the AQIS decisions were principally carried out by the last government, to their shame. The history books will read that it was the National Party ministers who carried out those actions, which destroyed industry after industry in agriculture in Australia.

The last member talked about there being no level playing field in corrupt markets out there. I would like him to demonstrate—and I do not criticise him because he was not in this place at the time—one single act by the previous government that was a concession to the fact that we had a corrupt world marketplace. Just the opposite took place. Whether it was grapes, tobacco, oranges, sugar or whatever, these people imposed upon us a free market system and forced us into a situation where we were competing against other countries whose farmers had a 49 per cent tariff support level. It is quite extraordinary to me.

To those people in what is left of the National Party, the six members that are here: ask yourselves why you were reduced from 19 members when I came into this place to six members now. Ask yourselves that question. I can answer it for you. In speech after speech after speech in this place, and at great cost to myself, with vicious personal attacks in the party room, behind my back and in the media, I spoke up against the things that my own government was doing. It was not because I liked doing it. In the end it became a matter of personal integrity. I had to leave the party because clearly their policies were the antithesis of every policy I had been brought up with in the Country Party through most of my life and also in the National Party as it was in Queensland up until Bjelke-Petersen was stabbed in the back by his own National Party colleagues in 1987.

I will return to the bill proper. We do not have an exceptional circumstances declaration. The minister has been kind enough to give me another meeting on this, but we must bring the following to the minister's attention. We have just experienced not the worst but the most extensive flooding in our history. In almost every town in North Queensland, in a belt from Ingham to Normanton—which is right through the centre of North Queensland—we have experienced either the second or third worst flooding in our entire history. If that is not an exceptional circumstance, I really do not know what is.

The last speaker talked about drought. We have droughts—there is no doubt about that—in North Queensland, but we do not have a drought at the start of the year. At the start of every year we have just the opposite; we have flooding. On the extent of the flood-
ing, when I flew from Cloncurry to Normanton a few weeks ago, I thought, ‘Jeez, what a magnificent season,’ because it was green on either side of the aeroplane for the whole 400 kilometres. When I got within 150 kilometres of Normanton it turned brown. I had assumed the flooding was still there because there was 150 kilometres of brown. We were flying over green and suddenly we were flying over brown. When I got on the ground and said to Ashley Gallagher, a prominent grazier and ex-Mayor of Normanton, ‘It’s all brown; is the water still up?’ he said, ‘No; all the grass is dead and it won’t come back.’ This is much worse than a drought, because we have no grass at all.

Minister—through you, Mr Deputy Speaker—we desperately need an exceptional circumstances declaration. In that area, which is maybe 200 kilometres going east from Normanton and maybe 150 kilometres going south—do not pin me down on the exact dimensions of the catastrophe—it would appear that between 10 and 30 per cent of the graziers’ cattle has gone. If you lose 15 per cent of your cattle you have no chance of survival. I do not see how you could have any chance of survival. I must emphasise that the sugarcane farmers at Ingham are in exactly the same hole. They are talking about 20 and 25 per cent losses over a very large area of the Herbert River basin. That would probably be about seven to eight per cent of the Australian sugar industry, which—we have very good prices for sugar because India has withdrawn from the market—may well be bringing in $3,000 million a year.

No-one here bothers to read any books on the Depression, but if you read the books on the Depression in Australia—

Mr Hunt—I do; I just read one.

Mr KATTER—Well, I do not know which one you have because I asked the library for all 15 of them before Christmas and I have not had a request for one single one of them to be returned. I do not know which one you are reading. But, if you read them, you would know that the only industry that showed serious economic clout as far as taking Australia out of the Depression was the sugar industry. It is very interesting because in 1938—almost after the Depression was over—the government belatedly decided that they had to give a minimum-price scheme for sugar. The minimum-price scheme followed the German economic model, and by 1932 Germany had no depression. They were flying; they had great prosperity in 1932. I might add, for the edification of the opposition, they spent money—they spent absolutely heaps of it. They actually printed money. Hjalmar Schacht printed money. When the scheme was put in place, the first thing they did was give the farmers a guaranteed livable price for their product, and one million of the six million people unemployed were taken off the unemployment rolls and put on to the farms in Germany, by the farmers themselves. Once they were given a price they could live with, they went out and spent money and employed people and got the German economy going.

Returning to the bill proper, leaving the present group of people there: Minister, I have to say that I am really not pleased with the exceptional circumstances situation. I had two very bad cases under the previous government. In fact, the cases were so bad that it was alleged that the then Minister for Trade, the now member for Wide Bay and the Leader of the National Party in this place—although it is rather a curious situation—

Mr Snowdon—But is he a National Party member?

Mr KATTER—Well, he is not; he is a Liberal Party member, and he is still holding
down the leadership. I would say to the National Party people in New South Wales and Victoria: there is a golden opportunity here to pull the rug out from under a person who I believe is one of the worst members of parliament I have seen in 35 years in politics!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—I just remind the speaker to remember the legislation and to speak through the chair, please.

Mr Snowdon—That was a very strong claim!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Through the chair, thanks.

Mr Snowdon—All right, through the chair: that was a very strong claim!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Indeed. Now be quiet, thank you.

Mr KATTER—I could not quite see there for the shine coming off his head! I had two very bad examples of the performance of the exceptional circumstances committee, where they were very dramatically wrong and then refused to admit their mistake. Whether it was the fault of the Queensland government or the federal government was never clearly indicated, but at the present moment, if the minister could take cognisance of this fact, we have had the second worst flood in Ingham or Normanton’s history, in 130 years of European occupation, and we do not have ‘exceptional circumstances’. We are returning the people who are overseeing the board and saying, ‘They’ve done a good job; we should leave them there.’ I have to say that I am very curious to know how they justify not giving exceptional circumstances. We would desperately like the minister to take cognisance of the very serious plight of the sugarcane farmers at Ingham and, on the other side of the Great Dividing Range, the graziers, certainly from Croydon and arguably from Georgetown, all the way to Normanton—right across North Queensland.

Finally, I find myself in the situation of having to ask the minister to do a very difficult job. Well, I do not think it is all that difficult a job. I am sure a person of his capacity would not find this a difficult job. The Reserve Bank of Australia is putting out money at three per cent. All we are saying is: could we please have some of that money at two per cent—so we might need a million dollars in subsidy—and can we restructure our existing loans? Restructuring is a nice sort of phrase that obfuscates, but, with the money that we owe the banks, they have got us locked into overdraft at 12 and 15 per cent at the present moment. That is going to destroy all of the sugarcane farmers. And, when their blocks are sold up, it will not be sugarcane farmers that buy those blocks; it will be lifestylers. Almost every single sugarcane block that is going onto the market is being bought by lifestylers. We will close the mills. The AWA will lose their membership of 5,000 people. And this country will lose the enormous income which it is enjoying at the present moment in the sugar belt. Over in the cattle belt, if we do not get this money it will take us 15 to 20 years to build our numbers back up to where they are at the present moment. If we get this money we can buy heifers or weaners, many of which would have been spayed—and they will not be spayed; they will be purchased as breeders and we will replenish our herds so that we can keep this great beef industry of Australia going.

Turning back to the exceptional circumstances, what we are asking the government for is a loan to restructure our existing loans. If we get exceptional circumstances then our existing loans, many of which are in overdraft at 12 and 15 per cent, can be restructured, at the very least at three per cent from the Reserve Bank—but I would hope that the government’s generosity could find $1 mil-
lion out of the $270,000,000,000 it is going to spend this year to subsidise those loans down to two per cent. I just think there is a principle involved here.

I was soundly criticised—some would say ‘given a flogging’—when we moved the QIDC, the Queensland state bank, to become a fully-fledged bank. They accused me of having set the bank up to look after my rich cocky mates. There was no doubt that I was one of the two ministers who had responsibility for the state bank of Queensland, the QIDC—and I was probably the one who had the more immediate responsibility. It was the Rural Reconstruction Board before it became the QIDC. It was set up on the premise that in bad times we would borrow money and lend it out to our farmers and to other businesses and industries in trouble. We would borrow the money and lend it out. The great advantage with the farmers was that they could provide our bank with security. Farming is a magnificently secure lending operation for banks. Land prices, even in the worst situations, do not tend to collapse; that is very rare. In fact, the wool collapse was the only time in my lifetime that we saw land prices go down. The banks have super security. So we could go in and lend the money through the QIDC, knowing that we had super security for that money.

In the old Queensland government we were regarded as pretty cunning blokes—and we were, because when things came good it was not the Bank of New South Wales or the Westpac bank, as it is now, or the National Bank that had that account; it was the QIDC that had that account. We took huge amounts of magnificently profitable business out from under the mainstream banks. They would not carry these people, they would not help these people in their times of plight and necessity—in fact, they tripped them into overdraft rates and cost them a fortune. I will go no further than myself, who started life as a humble labourer at Mount Isa Mines and who owned 250,000 acres unencumbered in the Gulf Country when I went into parliament. I was on 29 per cent interest rates in the second last year on Saint Francis station.

I do not want to go into the details of how farmers get tied into that sort of situation, but the banks say: ‘You’re an at-risk industry, so there’s an extra 2½ per cent. You’re an at-risk person, so there’s another 2½ per cent on top of that. You’re on overdraft rates, we’re not going to roll your loan over, so there’s another 3½ per cent on top of that.’ And, because it is an at-risk area, they lob another 2½ per cent on top of that again. Then they have charges each year. They want the thing to be valued every two seconds. There are numerous charges like that. It worked out to 29 per cent in our second last year on Saint Francis.

These poor people are suffering that sort of oppression at the present moment. They should not have to. They are decent, hard-working people who have done absolutely nothing wrong. They have been thrown a bit of a curveball here. All they need is a little bit of time. If you have a bloke who knows how to run a cattle station in the gulf, you want to keep him there. These blokes know how to run a sugarcane farm and will continue as sugarcane farmers—they are not lifestylers who will buy a farm, sit on it and do nothing with it. They are providing jobs for mill workers. There are 5,000 AWU members alone in that industry before you get to the AMWSU and all the other unions, which are very good representatives.

Minister, please can you give us exceptional circumstances so we can transfer those bank loans to an interest rate that we can live with, instead of being put on a punitive interest rate and being punished for something we have not done and are totally innocent of. It is in the public interest to keep in the gulf
those people who know how to run a property in the gulf. You do not learn overnight how to run a property in the gulf. I speak with very great authority, having had cattle in the Gulf Country all of my adult life. These people are experts in their field. They have honorary degrees from the university of hard knocks, and they are well deserved—and it is similar in the sugar industry. We have to get those exceptional circumstances.

I fail to understand how, when we have had the second worst flood in 150 years of white settlement, it is not an exceptional circumstance. Everyone thinks in terms of drought. In North Queensland we do not have droughts; we have floods. In the days of enlightened government we had banks. There were great men in Australia’s history. King O’Malley set up the Commonwealth Bank. Ted Theodore knew the answers to the Depression. Both Malcolm Fraser and Paul Keating quoted him as one of their heroes, and of course if you go into my office you will see a big picture of ‘Red’ Ted on the wall. He set up the Commonwealth Development Bank. McEwen put huge amounts of money in the Commonwealth Development Bank and set up the Primary Industry Bank and the AIDC. They did that because they knew we needed these sources of funds so that we would not have to put upon our minister to go cap in hand to Treasury and ask for a loan that was going to return no benefit to the Treasury, but we did it because we were making huge profits out of it, to be quite frank. (Time expired)

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (7.49 pm)—in reply—First of all I thank everybody who has participated in the debate on the Rural Adjustment Amendment Bill 2009. The amendment in this legislation involves only half-a-dozen words, but it has provided an opportunity for broad-ranging debate, and I certainly welcome that. Some people have used the debate only in part to give me a whack back for the different things I have said during question time—and good on them, that is part of the banter back and forth. Overwhelmingly, this debate has been an opportunity for people to put on the record the extraordinary levels of hardship they have seen and to deal with the policy challenges. We all acknowledge that we have not got this right yet. The emotion that has come out in some of the speeches—and I was not able to be in here for many of the speeches today—

Mr Katter—You were here for a few, and you should be applauded, Minister, for that. We thank you.

Mr BURKE—I was here during the speech of the member for Maranoa, which I think was a really good example of somebody recollecting, when talking through the policy, the very deep hardship they have seen in their own electorate. As soon as he reminded me of the time that we shared a platform in his electorate, I recalled being told the moment the plane landed that in the previous few days there had been yet another suicide in that community. Those sorts of stories are far too commonplace for members of parliament, including in the electorate of the member for Mallee, who is here. It is difficult to see an area that is doing it tougher than Mildura. Drought is always hard, and an irrigation drought is something nobody thought to plan for. I also acknowledge the member for Calare, the shadow minister, and the very real hardship in many parts of his electorate. Some parts have good news again, but there have been some good farmers who were unable to stay in business while they waited for the good news to come.

There is one argument that has been put in a number of speeches. I continue to refute it and I will refute it again. I once again want
to caution members about this particular fear campaign. The government has continued to say that any changes from a crisis management approach to a risk management approach with our drought policy—which we are still working through—are about trying to help people better prepare for the next drought. All our discussions with industry have worked on the basis that the rules will not change from under people who are still going through the current drought.

I know that each year when the budget comes out there is a level of alarm about EC payments not appearing in the forward estimates. I have here—and there is no point tabling them, because they are already public—pages from the previous government’s final budget. In the out years, nothing is there. That was not because they were planning to abolish EC. It is the strange way that these issues always appear in the forward estimates. Every budget, the same argument will be able to be run. This time, you had the added complication of some issues appearing in the Treasury papers which used to appear in the Agriculture papers. But of all the different political campaigns to run back and forth, I plead with every member of parliament to try to avoid running a fear campaign that gives people who are already very much living on the edge a fear which they do not need to have.

The guarantee has been given many times by me and the Prime Minister. I hope that, when we hit next year’s budget, this will not be an issue. Whatever the new drought policy is, I do not know that we do much for the people who are still working under the old transition system, who have drought declarations and EC declarations appearing in the same form, by participating in a fear campaign when we know that this is the way that the budget has always been presented since this issue was first brought in.

There are other challenges with the current drought system that were part of the broad canvassing of debate. I do not know whether we will be able to fix all of them with the new drought policy. We are having very constructive talks with industry. But the issue of lines on maps remains a grave injustice. To have two adjacent properties that have an identical level of hardship sharing a fence but not sharing an EC boundary, not getting the same assistance—one getting it and the other not—is an unjust feature of the current system. When I first made the ministerial statement referring to what we wanted to do with drought policy, the Leader of the Nationals, to his credit, raised lines on maps as being a problem and also said that the previous government had on many occasions tried to find a way around it and found that it is really hard to do. And it is. We are still wrestling with that and working our way through it with industry.

The other issue which has been raised, and it was raised just now by the member for Kennedy, is that drought is not the only form of hardship that farmers face. To the extent that we get drought policy right—and that is only limited, but there is certainly a lot of good done through the current drought policy—we do not take adequate account of other forms of hardship. The stories that the member for Kennedy tells are all too true. We have a very unusual situation in his seat. I was warned about it when I travelled with him to Cloncurry and Normanton. I was warned then by the pastoralists that, even though what I was looking at was a mass of water and a flood, if I were to come back a few months later, exactly what the member for Kennedy has just reported on would be what I would see—a landscape that looked like a drought. That is for the very simple reason that, if you have a flood and it lasts a few days, a week or even a week and a half, when it goes the land will largely bounce
back, but when you have vegetation covered
for something in the order of six weeks—and
I think that is right—

Mr Katter—Yes. It could be eight weeks.

Mr BURKE—the vegetation is largely
gone. What then happens is that as the heat
returns you have nothing to hold the soil
moisture together. When you add the fact
that—from what I understand from the first
musters up there that took place last month
and that are concluding now—basically the
entire calf population is gone, you have very
similar impacts to the ones that we talk about
with drought, but they do not satisfy the EC
test. Yet, on the face of it, if you took the
words ‘exceptional circumstances’ for what
they say, by any definition flood is excep-
tional and is a situation for which people
would want us to find a way of providing
greater levels of assistance than the current
policy settings allow. Those talks with the
member for Kennedy are ongoing. I cannot
report a landing point yet, but the concerns
that the member for Kennedy raises match
exactly what I have seen firsthand on the
ground in his electorate.

They are a number of the challenges that
we want to work through. I appreciate the
genuine nature of the debate that has gone on
across the House in this discussion. There
will always be times when there is a whole
series of issues such that the partisan nature
of this chamber takes over, and that is part of
it. We are not going to pretend to take the
politics out of the parliament. But all people
involved in primary industries ought to be
able to use this debate as a reference point
to understand the very high level of goodwill
and desire to get policy right in their interests
that exists on every side and in every corner
of this chamber.

I should finally refer to what the legisla-
tion that we are about to vote on actually
does. The National Rural Advisory Council
only allows people to serve two terms. There
are challenges and there are times when the
National Rural Advisory Council gets it
wrong. There were some very strong exa-
miples of this that were put forward earlier in
the debate by the member for Hume. One of
the challenges that I have tried to deal with
within the current policy settings is to make
sure that, where there is an allegation that the
National Rural Advisory Council has got
something wrong, they go back in there as
soon as possible and reassess. We have been
doing that constantly.

If an area is largely in recovery, I urge the
state ministers to let us know beforehand
what the revised boundaries should be so that
we can do the check under revised bounda-
ries, instead of having the situation we have
at the moment, which is where the National
Rural Advisory Council makes a majority
ruling on a region and you end up with a
whole lot of people who are not out of
drought at all being told that they have no
benefits and then having to wait for the reas-
essment under new boundaries so that they
can be told, ‘Oh, no; now we’ll look after
you.’

A similar challenge was raised very early
after I got the portfolio by a number of
members from each side of the House. There
are challenges which occur due to the NRAC
decisions coming down too late and too close
to the concluding day. An argument has been
put many times by David Crombie that, if
farmers are going to stay, they should be able
to stay with dignity and, if they are going to
leave, they should be able to leave with dig-
nity. People are not treated well by getting a
couple of weeks notice of benefits ending.
The current system lends itself to that. We
have now started to try to conclude the proc-
ess earlier. But that of course means that we
do not end up with the benefit of the latest
data. That is a balance that we are trying to
work through.
This bill allows us to appoint the members of the National Rural Advisory Council for a further term. They have a great level of expertise. They deal at the absolute coalface. Even though there will be times when members say they have made a mistake or the majority decision was not just, I have to say they are extraordinarily decent people. Originally all of them came to me as appointees of the previous government and I would like the opportunity to be able to ask each and every one of them to stay on. They do their job in an extraordinarily honourable and professional way. This bill, if it is carried, would provide that opportunity.

I urge the Senate in the time that it has remaining before we rise to deal with this bill hopefully more quickly than we did. I do not want to be in a situation from 1 July where we do not actually have a fully functioning NRAC to make those decisions. There is a strong case to maintain the expertise of the current serving members on NRAC. If the legislation does not get progressed in the winter sitting, the remaining members of NRAC could be required to take on additional responsibility and new members would need to be chosen to replace the retiring members, even though those members ultimately would not have needed to retire. I hope we can avoid that situation. Certainly it would be regarded as unsatisfactory by the farmers who rely on those decisions.

I commend the bill to the House. I thank the opposition and the crossbench for the constructive way that they have dealt with the debate. I certainly hope that at some time in the near future I am able to report on a proposal for a new drought policy that is able to retain the sort of bipartisan approach which has characterised this debate for so many years.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (8.02 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, on indulgence and in the spirit of the comments of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, I seek to put a question to him. The thing that is worrying my farmers is that the portfolio budget statements—I think it is page 60—attempt to explain why the forward estimates do not add EC but contain the sentence ‘because EC is to be terminated’. I wonder whether the minister might put on the public record and make a contribution to the gesture he is asking for by removing the fear.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (8.02 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, on indulgence: I can give the same guarantee that I have given on many occasions. The date that appears in the budget papers refers to the termination of those payments appearing in the portfolio statements of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. It does not refer to the termination of the program. They cease to appear in the portfolio statements. I give the guarantee to each of the farmers in your electorates who are currently on EC payments that, when we reach 1 July, in a few weeks time, they will continue to receive the payments. Those budget allocations now appear in the Treasury papers because of a COAG decision rather than in the Agriculture papers. That is why you have an annotation there. Where they appear in the Treasury papers, the usual problem with the forward estimates is still there. But that is the reason for the unusual annotation which is there. I hope that that provides an absolute level of clarity. The people who are eligible at the end of this month continue to be eligible next month and onwards throughout current declarations. I cannot prejudge future NRAC decisions and recommendations as to whether those drought declarations will be renewed, but if they were to be renewed it is certainly the intention of the government that
those people would continue to be eligible for assistance.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

**Third Reading**

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (8.04 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**NATIONAL GREENHOUSE AND ENERGY REPORTING AMENDMENT BILL 2009**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 18 March, on motion by Mr Combet:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (8.05 pm)—The National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Amendment Bill 2009 is not of itself controversial. It builds on that which was put in place by the previous coalition government and, in particular, by the now Leader of the Opposition, the member for Wentworth. The bill fits within a broader pattern of action on climate change. It essentially deals with a further amendment to the process of ensuring that there is adequate reporting of greenhouse emissions. But it comes within the context of four major recent disappointments at the way in which the government has chosen to handle the issue of advancing the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

I begin by noting the context in which this bill is being debated whilst noting that the bill itself is not controversial and not the subject of disagreement—although it could be the subject of improvement from the opposition. The first of the recent disappointments is the axing of the solar rebate with notice effective on the day on which it was terminated. The public, the industry and the suppliers were not informed in advance that two weeks ago the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts was to draw the axe down upon the solar rebate program. That spelt enormous difficulty for suppliers and retailers. It spelt great disappointment for mums, dads, retirees and other people who were expecting to put solar panels on their roofs through the process of the solar panel rebate. That was blow No. 1. It was unanticipated, unexpected and without notice and it cut away at the very notion of certainty which sits at the heart of this bill.

The second of the disappointments is what we saw only yesterday: the Renewable Remote Power Generation program—you could summarise it as the remote solar program—was terminated. It was terminated by email at 8.33 am, as I have been advised by those businesses that received the email, effective as of 8.30 am. I have had businesses report to me that they had programs worth tens of thousands of dollars that they were expecting to conclude through contract in the coming weeks. I have had one business report to me that the effect of this decision will be the loss of $1 million a month in terms of business for a South Australian firm. I have spoken with individuals who had been planning to ensure that, because they live in remote, off-grid areas, they would have access over the coming days or weeks to renewable energy as a result of this program, which was introduced by the previous, coalition government. Again, it was axed; again, it was unanticipated; again, there was no notice—not eight hours this time, though, but minus three minutes. The notice was given after the program had been terminated. That is not the way to treat small-business people—men and women who have invested, who have expected certainty, who have come to believe that they should be able to rely upon the government of the day in Australia to be...
good to its word. This bill is about certainty, but those two examples spell a lack of certainty.

The third recent contextual element that I want to present in terms of the breaking down of certainty is a very simple one: in relation to the renewable energy target, we have clearly indicated that we support the concept of the 20 per cent target, we have indicated that we wanted to take this legislation forward, and what we saw first is that this legislation was delayed for a year. It has still not been debated in this House, two days before the House is due to break for the winter session. What we see as well is that, at the last minute, this bill was coupled to the emissions trading scheme. It did not have to be thus. That was not indicated previously. There was a common test, but that could easily have been dealt with through separate parallel regulations and the government knows this.

I am advised that the initial coupling of these two bills was an inadvertent drafting error. I am advised that the government considered decoupling but the Prime Minister’s office thought that it might be valuable in a political sense to maintain the link and therefore place uncertainty around their own legislation and therefore place uncertainty around the pipeline of renewable energy investment in Australia. That is a venal act—something which is not desirable, which should not occur and which broke the opportunity to have fast, early passage of legislation with bipartisan support. That is a great shame. We still support the renewable energy target of 20 per cent. We will deal with the legislation on its merits. I will deal with those items in more detail when we come to face that bill later this week. However, those three items have all shown the way in which this government have caused severe and significant uncertainty for people who have a focus on reducing emissions, reducing greenhouse gases and working in the renewable energy space.

The fourth of the contextual elements is the emissions trading scheme. The government has deliberately delayed the regulations. We have seen only a couple. We have seen a handful of regulations, yet we know that there are close to three figures worth of regulations affecting industries which need to be tabled and which we need to see. These are fundamental if we are to provide the certainty which this bill seeks to provide. That represents the context.

I want to make a couple of points about the core bill itself. The history of the bill is this. The National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007 was an initiative of the now Leader of the Opposition. It established a national framework for reporting greenhouse gas emissions for certain abatement actions as well as energy consumption and production by corporations. The act also provided for public disclosure of company-level greenhouse gas emissions and energy production and use, and it also aimed at streamlining national greenhouse and energy reporting and ensuring that a system was developed with least cost and least administrative burden. All of those things together were a good step forward.

Against that background what we see is that this bill essentially updates the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007. It seeks to improve the original act and better reflect its original policy intentions to establish an audit framework under the act so as to respond to industry feedback. That is a good thing. We have no problems with that. We see that it is unlikely that this bill will make any change at all in terms of industry burden. It is my strong, clear and precise hope that it will lessen any burden that industry faces in its reporting.
Against that background I want to make three comments specifically about the bill itself. The first is that the government has been brief in terms of the fact that only 20 days had been allocated to stakeholders to give feedback on the consultation paper regarding this issue. That is a challenge for people who are short of time in the public space. They needed time, they needed additional space. Industry has nevertheless adapted.

The second thing is that we see amendments which have been tabled by the government. We have been given notice of them today. We have examined them carefully. We note that they are intended to ensure that corporations can transfer responsibility for reporting between entities under the same organisation. However it is extraordinary that the government tables these with only a few hours notice.

We will not oppose that amendment in this House. We have examined it. We have reviewed it carefully, but we will give it a double scrutiny in the Senate. If you want to act cooperatively, if you want to work in a way which actually promotes the business of the parliament, to provide a bare couple of hours for an amendment is not the way to so act.

The third thing that I want to say is this: there is one element which has not yet been addressed to the best of our understanding and that is the concerns over the definition of ‘operational control’ in relation to mining. We will examine what the government is proposing in its amendment and if it appears that that does not deal adequately with the mining industry’s needs we will move an amendment to ensure that there is certainty and flexibility for the mining industry with regards to the relationship between mine owners and contract miners. We have a clear belief, after consultation with the mining sector, with the contracting sector and with broader Australian industry, that there does need to be clarity and flexibility for the mining industry by defining with certainty the operational control responsibility for purposes of reporting. So I give notice that the coalition will move an amendment in the Senate if it is not otherwise satisfied that there will be greater certainty for miners, mine owners and mine contractors through a better definition which gives a default position that mine owners will henceforth have responsibility in the absence of a contractual agreement for reporting greenhouse emissions.

So on that basis I note that the coalition introduced the original legislation. The way in which this legislation fits within a broader context is to note that the solar rebate was abolished with no notice and no certainty to industry. The Renewable Remote Power Generation program—or the remote solar program, in shorthand—was abolished only yesterday, retrospectively, by three minutes. Nobody had any notice. The renewable energy target could so easily have been passed this week if the government had sought in any way to work with us and not play games with the future of the renewable industry.

Finally, I note that this comes in the context of serious concerns about the emissions trading scheme and the broader debate going on at present. There are real and practical things which can be done to reduce emissions and they take the form of solar power and wind, and of reductions in all sorts of different ways in which we generate emissions. These could be dealt with through things such as a genuine renewable energy approach with bipartisan support if the government chooses to work in a bipartisan way.

So having said all of that, we are not opposed to this bill. We are comfortable with the direction of it and I give notice of the steps that we will take in the Senate.
Tonight I rise to support the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Amendment Bill 2009. The proposed amendments in this bill seek to clarify the requirements and regulations contained in the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007 and to better reflect its original policy intent. The National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Amendment Bill 2009 will also make minor changes to clarify definitions, improve its administration and strengthen the audit framework established by the act.

The act established a single national framework for reporting greenhouse gas emissions, abatement actions and energy consumption and production by corporations. The act included the mandatory registration of controlling corporations whose corporate groups produce energy or consume energy at or above specified quantities over a financial year. It was made mandatory for such corporations to register with the national system and outlined requirements for registered corporations to keep records and to provide reports.

The act also outlined the requirements concerning the security and disclosure of information, enforcement and administration arrangements. Further, it included the establishment of the Greenhouse and Energy Data Officer and other arrangements such as compliance monitoring. To ensure the highest integrity of such data, which may be meaningfully assessed, the proposed amendments seek a clarification of key operational terms relating to greenhouse and energy audits conducted under this act. The need for such an act, as you know and I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, is the evidence that the earth’s climate is changing. In fact the 10 warmest years on record have all occurred since 1990—

Mr Brendan O’Connor interjecting—

Mr MURPHY—Mr MURPHY—and I notice the Minister for Health and Ageing is supporting what I am saying here tonight, and I appreciate that. There can be absolutely no doubt that climate change is one of the most significant challenges facing Australia and our government, and indeed the world, in the 21st century and I am pleased to restate this evening that the Rudd government is committed to responding to those challenges.

Government action on climate change must be multifaceted. This approach includes investing in green infrastructure such as wind, solar and geothermal energy, promoting innovation to develop low-pollution technology and supporting businesses and households to improve their energy efficiency. The implementation of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is another important measure to address this great environmental challenge. The scheme, which puts a cost on carbon pollution and encourages major polluting corporations to lower their emissions, is at the core of our plan to limit the potentially detrimental effects of climate change.

Overwhelmingly, scientists throughout the world agree that our climate is changing and that human activity is the major cause of this. In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that warming of the climate system is unequivocal. The report goes on to say:

Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic (human) greenhouse gas concentrations;

In the face of the overwhelming consensus among scientists, it astounds me that many members of the opposition continue to doubt that climate change even exists. The decision by the coalition to delay the passage of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation merely reflects the climate change scep-
ticism that is rampant among the opposition benches. When the member for Wentworth, Mr Malcolm Turnbull, became the Leader of the Opposition last year, I was of the view that the Liberal Party finally had a leader who would fully support government action on climate change. Unfortunately, I was wrong. Tragically, the climate sceptics continue to control the Liberal Party.

In light of the opposition’s intention to delay action, I think it is timely to consider some of the likely impacts if the challenge posed by climate change is left unaddressed. Following the devastating bushfires in Victoria and the floods in Queensland and northern New South Wales earlier this year, the respected scientist and former Australian of the Year, Professor Tim Flannery, wrote an article in the Fairfax press about the continuing and growing risk of climate change. In that article, Professor Flannery called for urgent action to reduce emissions to prevent an even worse situation in the future. Moreover, there is general consensus that climate change will turn the Murray-Darling Basin barren. Critically, the basin serves over 40 per cent of all Australian farms and produces approximately one-third of Australia’s food supply. Imagine the most recent drought many times worse. The financial and personal hardships faced by farmers and their families will be exacerbated, coupled with soaring food prices and increasing constraints on economic growth. This is the situation we face if we fail to act now.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change also warned in 2007 that, unless urgent action were taken, the world would have a less than 10 per cent chance of avoiding a two-degree increase in global temperatures within the next 10 years. Moreover, rising temperatures may lead to the further melting of Antarctic ice sheets, causing sea levels to rise. The consequences of this would be disastrous. The immediate effects would be the flooding of ports, the collapse of trade and the severing of communications such as road and rail links on the New South Wales coast and even at Sydney Airport. There would also be hundreds of millions of refugees looking for new homes as low-lying areas are flooded around the world. Put simply, the potential effects of climate change are devastating and warrant urgent action. Unfortunately, for almost 12 years the former Howard government neglected the challenge posed by climate change. The delay and inaction that characterised the Howard government’s response means that the need to act now is far more important and urgent. We can no longer afford to do nothing—the risks of inaction are too great.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, action on climate change requires a multifaceted response. Good public policy addresses long-term issues whilst recognising the needs of the present. The emission reduction targets of between five and 25 per cent on 2000 levels by 2020 included in the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme reveal that the Rudd government has addressed this dual challenge. Our commitment to reduce our carbon pollution demonstrates that we are ready and willing to tackle the long-term threat of climate change. I particularly welcomed the announcement last month by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Climate Change and Water that the government would increase its emissions reduction target range from five per cent to 15 per cent to five per cent to 25 per cent below 2000 levels by 2020. Many constituents in my electorate of Lowe expressed concerns that the 15 per cent target was an insufficient response to the environmental challenges we face. The minister has responded to these concerns and I applaud her decision to increase the target.

It is simply incorrect to argue, as some opposition members have, that environmental policies are bad for our economy. On
the contrary, environmental policies, such as the government’s emissions trading scheme, carry a major economic benefit. The current slowdown in economic output both globally and domestically provides Australia with the perfect opportunity to develop a green economy. We need to combine our response to the current economic crisis with policies that enhance our ecological sustainability. We cannot rely on high-polluting and environmentally destructive industries to take Australia out of the economic downturn. To do so would simply mean that the current economic crisis is followed by an environmental crisis.

In 2008 the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Conservation Foundation issued a report illustrating the potential growth of green-collar jobs. The report identifies six key markets—namely, renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable water systems, biomaterials, green buildings and waste and recycling. The report states:

With the right policy settings, six market sectors currently valued at $US15.5 billion and employing 112,000 people could grow by 2030 to a value of $243 billion and 847,000 jobs.

The report emphasises that this can only be achieved ‘with the right policy settings’. The Rudd government has committed over $13.5 billion to programs that will invest in low-pollution jobs and increase demand for low-pollution goods and services. For example, the $1.3 billion Green Car Innovation Fund will support the development and manufacturing of low-emission and fuel efficient cars in Australia. The most recent budget invested $4.5 billion in the Clean Energy Initiative. This includes $2 billion over nine years for carbon capture and storage demonstration projects and $1.5 billion over six years for up to four large-scale solar electricity generation projects. This initiative is supported by the Renewable Energy Fund and the Energy Innovation Fund. Australia’s innovative capacity has always been one of our greatest assets and we must deploy this asset in the fight against climate change.

These funds will support Australian businesses to restructure their production processes to become more energy-efficient and to reduce their carbon emissions. These initiatives, which promote the development of low-carbon technology, complement the government’s emissions trading scheme. Earlier this year, the government allocated $3.9 billion to the Energy Efficient Homes program to install ceiling insulation in up to 2.9 million homes and solar water systems in over 300,000 homes—

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.

**Petition: Queensland and New South Wales Floods**

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (8.30 pm)—I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Coffs Coast, because there has been substantial inequity in the treatment of the victims of the storm event of 31 March. It is an issue that has touched the hearts of many residents in our region. It is an issue that prompted the local newspaper, the Coffs Coast Advocate, to sponsor this petition. I commend the Coffs Coast Advocate and their staff for the effort they have made in this regard. The Coffs Coast Advocate cares about the people affected by the 31 March storm event, the 6,000 people who signed this petition care about the people affected by the 31 March storm event and the Coffs Coast community cares about those people; but, sadly, our Prime Minister does not.
Our Prime Minister sees his way clear to promising assistance in this House—in the presence of the press gallery, in the full gaze of the national media—and delivers nothing. To our Prime Minister the plight of Coffs Coast storm victims is of no concern. He came into this House and promised them help on 25 May. He created a media opportunity, he danced in the spotlight and then he turned his back. He turned his back on many who had lost everything. He turned his back on the needy—people like 89-year-old war veteran Athol Hardie. He is a man with failing health who has lost everything. His house was destroyed and he was uninsured. The Prime Minister clearly believes that Athol Hardie is not worthy of assistance. The Prime Minister believes the countless pensioners, low-income earners and families affected by this storm are not worthy of assistance.

Well, I have a message for our Prime Minister: our community thinks differently. The 6,000 Coffs Coast residents who signed this petition think differently. They think that the Coffs Coast storm victims deserve help. They deserve the help of this parliament and they deserve the support of this House. The 31 March storm event was declared a natural disaster, just like other storm events this year. Yet this Prime Minister turns his back. The muddy waters were just as destructive in March as they were in May, yet the Prime Minister turns his back. Why do you take this course, Prime Minister? Why did you mislead this House by saying that assistance to individuals would be forthcoming, when it was not?

We have heard the feeble excuses of the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Ms Macklin—firstly, that the damage was primarily to public infrastructure. I doubt that Mr Athol Hardie would agree with that: his house was destroyed; it was washed off its foundations. And, when that pathetic excuse was discredited, the minister claimed that payments would not be made because only four local government areas were affected. What is so magic about the number four? Surely it is the case that when an area is declared a natural disaster area it is proof positive of the impact of a storm event. This simple fact appears lost on this government. This simple fact appears lost on the minister for community services. This simple fact appears lost on our Prime Minister.

This petition calls on the House to:
Provide Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Shire residents affected by the March 31, 2009 floods the same Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment of $1000 per adult and $400 per child that has been afforded to victims of the May 2009 floods in northern NSW and south east Queensland.
It is an issue of equity—the simple principle that all Australians should be treated equally by this government, no more and no less. Six thousand Coffs Coast residents have spoken, and the Prime Minister will be held accountable for his disregard for the wellbeing of the needy in our region. It is absolutely outrageous that, by virtue of postcode, some Australians are being treated less well than others. It is a principle that is un-Australian. It is a principle that is not acceptable to the people of the Coffs Coast. It is a principle for which this Prime Minister will be held accountable. I present the petition.

The petition read as follows—
To the Honourable The Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
This petition of frustrated residents of the Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Shire Councils draws to the attention of the House:
That individuals from the aforementioned Council areas who suffered property damage during the extensive floods in the region (March 31, 2009) have not received Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payments.
However, similarly affected flood ‘victims’ from the May weather event on the North Coast and Northern Rivers regions were/will be compensated following a Prime Ministerial directive made on May 25, 2009.

The payments announced were for a one-off immediate payment of $1,000 to adults and $400 to children.

While their neighbouring counterparts can access the payments having suffered the same personal disadvantages associated with a major flood, many individuals and families in the Coffs Coast region continue to struggle to make ends meet in the wake of the devastating and officially declared Natural Disaster of March 31.

The payments would go a long way toward helping recovery for those who have suffered substantial losses and should be made immediately to redress the anomaly.

We therefore ask the House to:

Provide Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Shire residents affected by the March 31, 2009 floods the same Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment of $1000 per adult and $400 per child that has been afforded to victims of the May 2009 floods in northern NSW and south east Queensland.

From (6,002) citizens

Petition received.

Ballarat Electorate: Young Leaders Visit to Canberra

Ms KING (Ballarat) (8.34 pm)—It was once said that democracy ‘forever teases us with the contrast between its ideals and its realities, between its heroic possibilities and its sorry achievements’. We have seen this week much robust debate in this parliament, and much of it about questions of leadership and honesty in public life. Democracy can, by its very nature, be frequently combative, and so it should be. For the moment, however, I would like to step outside the confines of this House and report on some feedback I received today.

Last fortnight, this parliament was host to 24 emerging young leaders from my own electorate of Ballarat. The young people, mostly aged in their 20s and 30s, are members of Leadership Ballarat and Western Region. It is a program of discovery, self-exploration and challenge that uniquely equips young leaders to guide the Ballarat region into the future. Over two days, these young people met with political leaders of different political persuasions, as well as two leading members of the press gallery and the Speaker for a series of half-hour, off-the-record question and answer sessions.

I would like to share with the House some of the feedback I have received from the group members about their trip to Canberra, and what they learnt from their experience. One participant said:

To meet with and have discussions with the nation’s leaders (and two leading journalists) was a great privilege and something I will remember for the rest of my life. These politicians are just people, like you and me, and their contribution to our nation is mainly a positive one. They are clearly passionate about our country and what they believe in. What an eye opener...

Another comment was:

If you want to see a myth busted—go to Canberra. Parliament and politicians are far from dull and uninteresting. Listening to what our politicians have to say builds confidence in the fact that there are people representing us who are smart, passionate and committed to serving us as a community.

Another participant wrote:

It was a wonderful experience to meet and talk with some of our country’s leaders. They were genuinely open and inspirational and offered personal insights into leadership that I will remember and use in work and family life.

Yet another participant talked about the insight gained from those meetings:
It has changed the way I view the political process and the role of politicians in a very positive way …

These comments are both timely and, I believe, not to be taken lightly.

In the daily and often rushed schedule of this parliament it must be noted that almost a dozen members of this House and of the other place, as well as the Governor-General, two senior members of the press gallery and the Speaker, took time out of their busy schedules to meet with these young people. According to the feedback I have received, all were not only open and honest in their exchanges but generous with their time and their insights, and in almost every case they left a lasting impression of genuine commitment and energy to public service.

Many in our electorates form a view of politicians and politics from what they read, hear and see in the media. But when they come here and meet our leaders face-to-face they are impressed by the dedication, hard work and vision of many of our representatives. The comments received by me today are a timely reminder of the calibre of the people who work here, their motivation and why many of us are drawn to public life. I want to personally thank all of the ministers and parliamentary secretaries, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Nationals in the Senate, the Governor-General, Paul Bongiorno, Laurie Oakes and the Speaker, who provided these young leaders from my electorate with such a rich and rewarding experience here during their short time in Canberra. It was an occasion that has clearly inspired them to actively engage in the political process and I encourage there being more of it.

Pollie Pedal 2009
Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, Sydney University

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (8.38 pm)—May I compliment the member for Ballarat on her initiative and her contribution to the House. I pay tribute tonight, in what I hope is a similar spirit, to all of the people who have been involved in Pollie Pedal 2009. As many members may know, Pollie Pedal is an annual long-distance bike ride involving some members of this House. It has now been going for 12 years. This year’s Pollie Pedal from Brisbane to Sydney was the longest and it was the hardest, but I would like to think that it was the best ride. It did not raise the most money of all of the Pollie Pedals but it did raise more than $100,000 for a particularly good cause. I think that under the current economic circumstances that is not bad going.

I want to pay tribute first of all to the people involved, then to the sponsors and finally I want to say a few words about the cause. It would not be a Pollie Pedal without the involvement of a number of members of this parliament. In the ride this year it was particularly good to have involved Bernie Rippol, the member for Oxley, who I think is the best cyclist amongst the parliamentarians; Luke Hartsuyker, the member for Cowper, whose electorate we traversed and who joined us for two days; and Senator Guy Barnett. Guy has type 1 diabetes and the fact that he can ride a bike for 100-odd kilometres a day is a great tribute to his tenacity and also a sign that people with that serious condition can still have a normal and full life. Finally, there was the remarkable Pat Farmer, the member for Macarthur, who is, I suspect, by far the fittest person in this House and arguably the craziest when it comes to doing things that require extraordinary physical determination and endurance. Although I
was a little disappointed, I should still pay tribute to the members for Parramatta, Menzies and Farrer, who wanted to be in the Pollie Pedal this year and were in it up until the last minute, when, unfortunately, they were detained by important electoral and other duties.

You cannot organise an event like this without a lot of volunteers. Our ride marshal, Peter Mowle, a former chief engineer of Goulburn City Council and now of Crookwell council, did a terrific job. He was assisted by a team of people who were mostly personal friends of his from Goulburn. There was also Tony Rule and a bunch of veteran cyclists, who not only rode much of the ride but also manned the support cars. Matt Hayden, the brothers Massard—Bill and Kevin—and Dick Mills all certainly deserve a formal tribute to them to be put on the record in this place.

But you cannot justify an event like this without sponsors. Amgen, the principal sponsor for the third year running; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, our second biggest sponsor for, I think the fourth year running; GlaxoSmithKline; Blackmores; Telstra; Hartmann; Norgine; Macquarie Bank; Bruck Textiles; and, in particular, Tourism Training Australia were all very generous and I pay tribute to them and thank them very much indeed.

But you cannot get sponsors to put serious amounts of money forward and you cannot get people to put their bodies on the road, so to speak, for a significant period of time other than for a good cause. This year we were raising money for Indigenous health scholarships at the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at Sydney University. The Poche Centre would not have come about but for the vision of one of Australia’s greatest philanthropists, Greg Poche. Thank you, Greg, for the work you have done. Thank you for being the absolute antithesis of a greed-is-good capitalist. If we are going to close the gap between Indigenous life expectancy and that of the general community, as all of us in this place wish, we need more Aboriginal doctors, more Aboriginal nurses and more Aboriginal people in the other health professions. That is what the Poche Centre is about and that is what the money that was raised will be going to.

It was great to share the ride for several days with a director of the centre, Associate Professor Ngiare Brown. She is a feisty woman is Ngiare Brown. I suspect that she has not voted Liberal—ever. I am not sure that I would be her favourite politician, but at least we understand each other better as a result of this ride. I know my insights have been deepened and I look forward to doing further rides for this good cause in the future.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (8.43 pm)—Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and hear, hear to that. This evening I would like to take the opportunity to talk about Norfolk Island, an Australian external territory out in the Pacific Ocean. It is about eight kilometres by five kilometres in size, or around about 33 square kilometres, and has a population of approximately 1,800 people. The island was named by Captain Cook in 1774 after the then Duchess of Norfolk. In 1856, the British government agreed to relocate 193 descendants of the Bounty mutineers from Pitcairn Island to Norfolk Island.

A wonderful history ensued. There is not enough time tonight to go through the history of Norfolk Island, but I would love everybody to read about it because it is an absolutely excellent story.
Let us fast forward to 1979 when the Australian government of the day passed the Norfolk Island Act. It is in its 30th year, to be marked this August. The act established the Norfolk Island’s self-governing regime, including the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly. The assembly elects nine members, including a Chief Minister, a Speaker and ministers. The Norfolk Island government and administration conducts its elections and this government also raises taxes, imposes charges, has a public service that it administers, as well as administering health, immigration, customs, quarantine and other areas of responsibility.

Federally, those islanders who are eligible and who elect to vote in federal elections are enrolled in my electorate of Canberra, unless they show a connection to another electorate which they wish to maintain a connection with. That makes me the federal representative of a number of Norfolk Island residents. That is a role which I value highly and recognise and exercise appropriately. I have also been a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories since my election in 1996. Through that time, the committee has conducted a number of inquiries on different aspects of Norfolk Island including, amongst others, health, communications, governance and financial matters. Through this work, and over these years, I have had the privilege of learning a lot about the community and the people of Norfolk Island and have seen how valuable and unique both the island and its community are. It is a wonderfully beautiful place. It relies very heavily on tourists taking their holidays there. Believe me, that is a relaxing and a rewarding thing to do and I encourage it.

It has become clear over the years, however, that Norfolk Island, with a population so small and being so remote, also faces its challenges. Indeed, with the global financial crisis, those challenges are becoming more and more evident. Considering the work of the committee inquiries and, more recently, considerations arising out of the GFC, it has become evident that some reforms must be considered for Norfolk Island to ensure its security and its future. I was very pleased, therefore, when former Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Debus, announced in late May the details of a package of reforms approved by the cabinet for Norfolk Island. I would like to quote in part from an open letter to Norfolk Island that Minister Debus released at the time. He said, amongst other things:

These reforms are designed to make Norfolk Island governance arrangements more consistent with those found in other Australian territories. He said the new arrangements will:

- Provide access to the Commonwealth Ombudsman to review Norfolk Island Government decisions.
- Provide residents with access to Norfolk Island Government records under Commonwealth freedom of information laws.
- Protect the privacy of residents under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Privacy Commissioner for records held by the Norfolk Island Administration.
- Allow residents to appeal to the Commonwealth Administrative Appeals Tribunal against a range of decisions made by the Norfolk Island Government and the Administration.
- Implement a framework for public financial management and reporting more closely aligned to the framework used by the Commonwealth including allowing the Commonwealth Auditor General to conduct audits of the Administration’s financial statements.
- Establish benchmark standards of conduct for Members of the Assembly consistent to those that apply in the States and the Commonwealth.

Minister Debus also made a note of commenting on the assistance provided by the
Norfolk Island Chief Minister, Andre Nobbs, and members of the government in getting that package together.

I have the privilege of knowing many people on the island and, while some residents may be reluctant to accept change, particularly change instigated from here, I believe the growing number of residents wanting these changes and more cannot be ignored and deserve to be heard. With them, I am looking forward to the very timely and effective implementation of this first stage of reforms for Norfolk Island and, with consideration and consultation with the island residents, further reforms to ensure a very secure and very firm future for Norfolk Island.

Child Pornography

Ms LEY (Farrer) (8.48 pm)—Australia’s internet child pornography laws are far too lenient. I remind the House of the recent investigation by Queensland’s Taskforce Argo, with Interpol and the FBI, which infiltrated a paedophile ring in 2006, arresting 22 core members and identifying another 2,500 customers of child sex websites in 20 countries. The Australian’s Michael McKenna reports on this case:

Former Australia Post human resources regional manager Derek Richard Mara, 30, will next month fight to have his commonwealth jail term cut after he was convicted as one of the four founding members of the internet’s oldest known paedophile ring. The Group, which financed made-to-order abuse movies and picture shoots of children, some just a few months old.

The Americans convicted for their involvement in ‘The Group’ have been sentenced to more than 30 years jail and five were given life. Mara, who was also charged with indecent treatment of a child, was given six years with a non-parole period of 32 months. Under appeal, he may get less. We cannot accept this standard of punishment in a society that values the innocence of children. I asked the Attorney-General last week in parliament whether he thought the penalties imposed by the courts for this heinous crime were too lenient and whether he would review them as well as look at our inconsistent state and Commonwealth laws. I was encouraged by the Attorney’s response when he said: … there may be scope… for federal legislation in this area… and it is appropriate to review the penalties.

How can a person with thousands of sexually explicit pictures and pornographic abuse videos featuring young children get away with a sentence of a few months in jail or a suspended sentence or a community service order or a fine?

In respect of this crime we are not standing up for children. We are not recognising the close relationship between those who view child abuse on-line and those who groom and procure then commit contact crimes. Our sentencing statistics indicate that those who say they are just looking are not committing such a grave offence, but make no mistake, a child abuse watcher is just as implicated as the real-life abuser. By creating a demand for the images they encourage ongoing abuse, whether for profit or not.

There are tens of thousands of people worldwide in the hardcore child-porn subculture preying on the children of poor and developing countries, who are coerced into appalling acts and filmed. The images are sold over the internet, often to educated, middle-aged, middle-class men who have children of their own and who lead outwardly blameless lives. Viewing these images, downloading these images and sharing these images are crimes for which the punishment is manifestly inadequate. We are letting a wave of sickness infect our society and we are sweeping it under the carpet.

In fact, a visiting American expert who works with the FBI was very blunt with me recently when he said: ‘You care more in this
country about smoking than you do about someone sexually abusing your children. You put graphic warnings on the front of cigarette packs, but you refuse to crack down on online child abusers.’ When I look at sentencing comparisons for the crime of online child abuse I am convinced that the US has it right and we have it wrong.

State sentencing is hopelessly inadequate because offenders are often sentenced in lower courts where the maximum penalty is less than the penalties of district courts. There are instances of individuals with thousands of hours of explicit images, including rape and torture, who receive very short or suspended sentences. Courts are not always shown the evidence. Judges do not want to traumatising the jury, if there is one, with the images and sometimes choose not to view material themselves. The defence plays a sympathy card: the defendant is hopelessly addicted, depressed, receiving treatment, on suicide watch, will not do it again! Unfortunately, as the defenders themselves tell us, they are highly likely to re-offend.

I want to recognise and thank the state and federal police forces around the country. I visited the AFP High Tech Crime Centre recently and spoke with men and women, who, in conjunction with our international partners in the Virtual Global Taskforce, painstakingly trace these criminals using web recognition tools, Google and specialised software, in what is a truly international effort to crack down on the trade in these heartbreaking images.

No software tool removes the need to sit and watch this stuff—to have it get inside your head and haunt you. Some of these investigators have observed the same children, over the years, suffering continual abuse. Sometimes they are able to identify locations, identify victims and arrest their attackers. These investigators are truly special people and we should recognise and thank them for their extraordinary efforts.

**Budget**

"Mr HALE (Solomon) (8.53 pm)—I certainly support the words of the member for Farrer. This evening I would like to inform the House about the importance of this year’s budget and highlight the obvious positive effects our government’s stimulus package is having on businesses in the Territory and in keeping Territorians in jobs.

Rather than my telling you how we are travelling up in the north, I will use a few quotes and excerpts that have been running in the media last week to tell the story. For example, I will tell you what Graham Kemp, General Manager of the Territory Construction Association said in a radio interview on the ABC on Wednesday last week. When asked, ‘Are we losing workers to other parts of the country?’ he said: No, we’re probably gaining workers from the other parts of the country at the moment because generally things have been so bad along the Eastern seaboard. So from our construction managers’ point of view, we’re getting a better choice of, or a greater choice of contractors, that they can draw on for their projects.

I would also like to draw attention to an article in last Wednesday’s Northern Territory News that had the headline, ‘NT most optimistic on staffing’. The article said: Territory bosses are the most likely to take on extra staff in the next few months, a survey shows.

Manpower’s employment outlook poll found NT companies were the most optimistic about hiring in Australia.

Territory unemployment remained at 3.6 per cent in May for the fourth month running, the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show.

The national level rose to 5.7 per cent.

Manpower’s managing director Lincoln Crawley said the NT was defying national economic trends."
“It’s promising to see that employers are not acting hastily, realising the need to retain key employees and the need to combat our ageing population before making pertinent headcount decisions,” he said.

“The Northern Territory has always displayed strong hiring activity and with one of the best economies in the country, the increase confirms past predictions.”

And yet another indicator of how we are travelling up in the Territory was reported on an ABC radio news bulletin last Thursday:

A survey of 1,800 small and medium sized businesses across the country found Territory businesses had by far the most optimistic outlook with 7 out of 10 saying they were confident about the future.

The report’s author, Christina Singh, says the most optimistic responses came from the tourism, building and construction industries. Ms Singh said:

The thing businesses tell us is that one of the key reasons that they’re feeling confident at the moment is that they feel the global financial crisis hasn’t really reached them in the Territory. So although we are having many businesses tell us that they are finding conditions difficult, but certainly not to the same extent as elsewhere.

Of course, much of this is as a direct result of the decisive action our government took in response to the global financial crisis. The Rudd Labor government’s budget is already supporting jobs today by building the infrastructure Australia needs for tomorrow.

We are seeing major projects being undertaken in my electorate of Solomon, through the infrastructure projects at all the schools, the work on Tiger Brennan Drive and the work at the hospital. The infrastructure measures delivered in the budget represent a critical investment in the drivers of Australia’s long-term economic growth. That includes an $8.5 billion investment in critical economic infrastructure—in road, rail and port networks. This investment will mean that when the global recovery takes hold our ports will not be straining, our rail networks will not be as poor and our roads will not be so clogged.

Many negative things have come out of the last two days, and this is a positive story about how the economic stimulus package is working for my electorate. I urge those opposite to take stock of where we are at and let the relevant inquiries and investigations take their course. Let us get back to the business of governing for all Australians, because I know that the people in my electorate do not enjoy what we have seen in the last two days. Let me finish with a brief quote from Treasurer and what he said in an address at the CEDA State of the Nation conference earlier this month. He said:

The fact is too many Australians will be hurt by this global recession. That’s why it is so important we pull together as a nation and face up to the worst the world can throw at us. … A nation building recovery which supports jobs and invests in the human and physical capital we’ll need to spring out of this global recession as the best placed nation on earth.

I could not agree with him more. (Time expired)

Gorton electorate: Roads

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (8.58 pm)—With very little time left I want to take this opportunity to thank my constituents in the electorate of Gorton for their hard work in campaigning for the Deer Park Bypass. The Deer Park Bypass opened very recently. It connects the Western Highway to the Western Ring Road. It was a long campaign, involving many events in the electorate and also the lobbying of the state government and a petition in this place. Five thousand petitioners petitioned for the construction of the Deer Park Bypass. That bypass has led to the removal of congestion in the suburbs of Caroline Springs, Burnside, Deer Park,
Kings Park and some other areas. It has also made it far more efficient and far easier for those who live in Bacchus Marsh and Melton to commute to the city without having to go through those suburbs. It is a fantastic piece of infrastructure. Of course, it created many jobs and it now provides a great opportunity for the commuters of that area, and throughout Melbourne, to take an easier passage from those communities. It was the great efforts of my constituents that have ensured that result.

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:

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to health and to make amendments consequential on the enactment of the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Act 2009, and for related purposes.

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to make provision in relation to professional indemnity cover for certain midwives, and for related purposes.

Ms Roxon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the National Health Security Act 2007, and for related purposes. (National Health Security Amendment Bill 2009)

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004, and for related purposes.

Mr Tanner to present a Bill for an Act to make various amendments of the statute law of the Commonwealth, to repeal certain Acts and provisions of Acts, and for related purposes.

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act relating to personal property securities, and for related purposes.

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend various Acts relating to the enforcement of the criminal law, and for other purposes.

Mr Bowen to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to corporations, and for related purposes.

Ms Kate Ellis to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Higher Education Support Act 2003, and for related purposes.

Mr Butler to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to provide for the establishment of the Automotive Transformation Scheme, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the ACIS Administration Act 1999, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Tax Agent Services Act 2009 and to deal with consequential and transitional matters arising from the enactment of that Act, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Trade Practices Act 1974 and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission Act 2001, and for other purposes.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
(Question No. 761)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 25 May 2009:

(1) Is he aware that in May 2009, the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council revealed an $18.5 million potential future loss on investments from collapsed collateralised debt obligations, which make up 75 per cent of investments made.

(2) Is he aware that in May 2009, the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council revealed that the building project known as ‘The Glasshouse Arts and Conference Centre’, totalling more than $50 million in capital expenditure to date and with an expected operating loss of $5.7 million per annum, makes up 6 per cent of overall Council annual expenditure and is more than its annual parks and gardens budget.

(3) Will the Australian Government consider an inquiry into local government investment strategies throughout Australia, to determine whether councils have been operating outside investment scope and jurisdiction or whether investment guidelines in Australia need improving.

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

Local government has been created under state legislation and is regulated by the states. State Governments are responsible for the day to day oversight of their local governments. The NSW Department of Local Government oversees the performance of local government in NSW and has recently developed draft investment policy guidelines to assist councils with the preparation of their investment policies and strategies. The department is currently undertaking consultations in relation to the guidelines.

Transport Security Programs
(Question No. 766)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 28 May 2009:

In respect of the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004 and the Regulations in force under it—

(1) Does an approved transport security program (TSP) exist for the operator of Sydney Airport; if not, why not.

(2) Do approved TSPs exist for Virgin Blue, Rex Airlines and Jetstar.

(3) Do TSPs provide requirements for the secure movement of airline staff and any airline or airport property in their possession (including staff identification passes, access passes to secure zones, flight manuals and the like) between any dedicated and secure staff car parking areas and any secure zones within the airport (airside and landside).

(4) What specific security measures have been put in place at Sydney Airport to cover the conveyance of pilots, engineers and cabin crew between the long term car park and the T2 Domestic Terminal.

(5) Is there any requirement for the provision of secure staff car parking areas to be provided at Sydney Airport for the airline staff in part (4) employed by Virgin Blue, Rex Airlines and Jetstar as have been provided for QANTAS staff; if not, why not.

(6) Is he aware of any secure staff car parking areas provided at Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Darwin and Canberra domestic airports for the pilots, engineers and cabin crew that are employed by Virgin Blue, Rex Airlines and Jetstar.

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
(7) Can he advise whether there is any standard international practice for the provision of airline staff with dedicated and secure car parking areas on airport land and secure dedicated transportation to terminal buildings.

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

(1) The Sydney Airport Corporation Limited (SACL) has an approved Transport Security Program (TSP).

(2) Virgin Blue and Rex have their own approved TSPs. Jetstar is included under the QANTAS Group approved TSP.

(3) No.

(4) None put in place by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

(5) TSP does not require the provision of secure car parking at Sydney Airport for employees of Virgin Blue, Rex Airlines and Jetstar. The provision of such parking for QANTAS staff is not a requirement under their approved TSP. The provision of parking is not a feature of the TSP as it is not required under the Aviation Transport Security Act (ATSA) or Aviation Transport Security Regulations (ATSR).

(6) Secure staff car parking is a commercial matter between airports and airlines. I understand that the situation in Australia’s capital city airports varies both in terms of whether secure parking is provided, and whether any secure parking is available to staff generally or is limited to pilots, engineers and cabin crew.

(7) I am not aware of any such standard or practice. From an international perspective it does not feature in Annex 17 to the Chicago Convention.