INTERNET

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SITTING DAYS—2009

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RADIO BROADCASTS
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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SIXTH 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. Alexander Michael Somlyay MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

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

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion

Treasurer

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate

Minister for Defence and Vice President of the Executive Council

Minister for Trade

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the House

Minister for Health and Ageing

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Minister for Finance and Deregulation

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House

Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate

Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research

Minister for Climate Change and Water

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts Attorney-General

Cabinet Secretary, Special Minister of State and Manager of Government Business in the Senate

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism

Minister for Human Services and Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law

Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Hon. Julia Gillard MP

Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Senator Hon. Chris Evans

Senator Hon. John Faulkner

Hon. Simon Crean MP
Hon. Stephen Smith MP

Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Hon. Jenny Macklin MP

Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP
Hon. Anthony Albanese MP

Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy

Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Senator Hon. Penny Wong

Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Hon. Robert McClelland MP

Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig

Hon. Tony Burke MP
Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP

Hon. Chris Bowen MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
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
Assistant
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
Parliamentary Secretary for Voluntary Sector
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 Innovation and Industry
Hon. Richard Marles MP
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<td>The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Truss MP</td>
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<td>Government and Leader of the Nationals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy</td>
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<td>and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<td>and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and</td>
<td>The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<td>Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP</td>
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<td>Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of the Nationals</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources</td>
<td>The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and</td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
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<td>Shadow Attorney-General</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors,</td>
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[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

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Shadow Assistant Treasurer  The Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities  The Hon. Bruce Billson MP
Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House  Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government  Mr Scott Morrison MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing  Mrs Margaret May MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence  The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs  Mrs Louise Markus MP
Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare, Status of Women and Youth  Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs  The Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Training and Sport  Dr Andrew Southcott MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia  Senator the Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport  Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development  Mr John Forrest MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs  Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources  Mr Barry Haase MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector  Senator Mitch Fifield
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation  Mr Mark Coulton MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration  Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence  The Hon. Peter Lindsay MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education  Senator the Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and Public Security  Mr Jason Wood MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate  Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
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Wednesday, 18 November 2009

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9 am and read prayers.

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
(ADDITIONAL SUBSCRIPTION)
BILL 2009

LONG SERVICE LEAVE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(TELSTRA) BILL 2009

STATUTE STOCKTAKE
(REGULATORY AND OTHER LAWS)
BILL 2009

NATIONAL CONSUMER CREDIT
PROTECTION (FEES) BILL 2009

AUSTRALIAN SPORTS ANTI-DOPING
AUTHORITY AMENDMENT BILL 2009

TAX AGENT SERVICES
(TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AND
CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS)
BILL 2009

Assent

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

PERSONAL PROPERTY SECURITIES
(CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS)
BILL 2009

FAMILY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (PARTICIPATION
REQUIREMENT) BILL 2009

NATIVE TITLE AMENDMENT BILL
(No. 2) 2009

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (9.01 am)—by leave—I move:

That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

I inform all honourable members that the Acting Chief Opposition Whip, the honourable member for Forrest, supports this motion.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Consideration of Private Members’ Business

Report

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (9.02 am)—I present the report of the recommendations of the whips relating to the consideration of committee and delegation reports and private members’ business on Monday, 23 November 2009. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Pursuant to standing order 41A, the Whips recommend the following items of committee and delegation reports and private Members’ business for Monday, 23 November 2009. The order of precedence and allotments of time for items in the Main Committee and Chamber are as follows:

Items recommended for Main Committee (6.55 to 8.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Notices

1 MR CIOBO: To present a bill for an act to change the administrative procedures for the Producer Offset, and for related purposes. (Tax Laws Amendment (Improving the Producer Offset) Bill 2009)

Time allotted—5 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Ciobo—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

2 MRS MIRABELLA: To move—

That the House:

(1) recognises that Wednesday 25 November 2009 is the International Day for the elimination of Violence against Women, the symbol of which has become the White Ribbon;

(2) applauds the work done by the White Ribbon Foundation of Australia to raise awareness amongst all Australians of the fact that many
women and their children live with violence, or the threat of violence every day of their lives;

(3) notes that approximately 350,000 women will experience some form of physical violence and 125,000 women will experience sexual violence each year;

(4) encourages all Australians to speak out against all forms of violence and when necessary take action against violence that may be occurring within their community;

(5) notes that violence against women costs the Australian people $13.6 billion annually;

(6) notes that the Rudd Government has squandered $16.2 billion on the Deputy Prime Minister’s Building the Education Revolution program while committing less than one third of a per cent of that amount ($55.2 million) to address this insidious problem; and

(7) condemns the Government for failing to commit any new money in response to the Time for Action Report while rebranding initiatives which were funded under the previous Coalition Government’s Women’s Safety Agenda.

Time allotted—20 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mrs Mirabella—5 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Whips recommend that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

3 MS REA: To move—
That the House:

(1) applauds the Government’s increase of total health funding in the foreign aid budget and an increase in spending to maternal, newborn and child health, which is much needed when in our region, including South Asia, 200,000 mothers and 3.2 million children are dying every year from preventable causes;

(2) notes that:
   (a) Australia still requires an increase in total health funding in the foreign aid budget to progress toward the Millen-
basic health services and strengthened health systems; and that this will demonstrate Australia’s leadership and commitment to ending the preventable deaths of children and mothers globally.

Time allotted—20 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Ms Rea—5 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes each.
[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]
The Whips recommend that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day
The Whips recommend all speeches to conclude by 8 pm.
Speech time limits—
Mr Abbott—10 minutes.
Other Member—10 minutes.
[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins]
The Whips recommend that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices—continued
4 MR OAKESHOTT: To move—
That the House:
(1) recognises that Wednesday 25 November 2009 is the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women which is symbolised by the wearing of a White Ribbon;
(2) calls on all men to actively participate in White Ribbon Day and speak out against violence against women;
(3) recognises and applauds the recent work of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD), to which the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development is a member, for the establishment of the AFPPD Standing Committee of Male Parliamentarians on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls on 7 September 2009;
(4) acknowledges that the establishment of the AFPPD Committee is a significant step in bringing together male parliamentarians from across Asia as role models and outspoken activists for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls;
(5) notes that one in three Australian women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime; and
(6) acknowledges that gender based violence costs the Australian economy over $15.1 billion each year, including health, work absenteeism, police and court related costs.

Time allotted—10 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Oakeshott—5 minutes.
Other Member—5 minutes.
[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]
The Whips recommend that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

5 MR GEORGANAS: To move—
That the House:
(1) notes the tragic loss of life to suicide which has taken an average of approximately 14 persons per 100,000 in Australia through most of the twentieth century—three quarters being male—and a disproportionately large number being in rural and regional areas;
(2) notes the establishment of RU OK?, an important national initiative to raise awareness about suicide rates, the impact of suicide on our society, and how we can all help to prevent suicide by connecting with each other;
(3) recognises and supports the inaugural RU OK? Day on 29 November 2009 that will bring Australians together to prevent suicide and raise the profile of organisations providing support for those affected by, or at risk of, suicide;
(4) acknowledges that sector research shows that people at risk are helped by talking about their problems—that a single conversation could change a life; and
(5) works to inspire and encourage all Australians to connect with friends and loved ones to prevent small problems from becoming big ones, by reaching out to anyone doing it tough and asking them ‘Are you OK?’.

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 8.30 pm

Speech time limits—

Mr Georganas—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minute each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Whips recommend that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items recommended for House of Representatives Chamber (8.40 to 9.30 pm)

COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION REPORTS

Presentation and statements

1 PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON CORPORATIONS AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

Report on an inquiry into financial products and services in Australia.

The Whips recommend that statements on the report may be made—statement to conclude by 8.50 pm

Speech time limits—

Mr Ripoll (Chair)—5 minutes

Other Member—5 minutes

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

2 STANDING COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Report on the inquiry into the impact of the global financial crisis on regional Australia.

The Whips recommend that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 9 pm

Speech time limits—

Ms King (Chair)—5 minutes

Other Member—5 minutes

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

3 STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND AGEING

Treating impotence. Roundtable forum on impotence medications in Australia.

The Whips recommend that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 9.10 pm

Speech time limits—

Mr Georganas (Chair)—5 minutes

Other Member—5 minutes

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

4 STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Making it Fair: Pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce.

The Whips recommend that statements on the report may be made—statement to conclude by 9.20 pm

Speech time limits—

Ms Jackson (Chair)—5 minutes

Other Member—5 minutes

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

5 STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

Report on the inquiry into meteorological forecasting.

The Whips recommend that statements on the report may be made—remaining Committee and delegation reports time prior to 9.30 pm

Speech time limits—

Ms Vamvakinou (Chair)—5 minutes

Other Member—5 minutes

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

Report adopted.
COAL MINING INDUSTRY (LONG SERVICE LEAVE FUNDING) AMENDMENT BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Gillard.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (9.03 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill will amend the Coal Mining Industry (Long Service Leave Funding) Act 1992 (the funding act) to ensure the continued operation of existing unique long service leave arrangements in the black coal mining industry. The amendments will clarify that the existing long service leave entitlements preserved by the Fair Work Act 2009 will be covered by the funding act. The bill will also introduce definitions of ‘black coal mining industry’, ‘employee’ and ‘employer’ and amend the definition of ‘eligible employee’ in the funding act to ensure that the scheme applies universally in the black coal mining industry.

Long service leave entitlements in the black coal mining industry currently flow from industrial instruments (awards and workplace agreements) and from contracts of employment. They are based on an employee’s service in the industry, rather than service with a particular employer.

Employees in the black coal mining industry have accessed portable long service leave entitlements under the terms of federal awards since 1949 which in turn were funded by an excise on coal production. Since 1993, under the funding act and related legislation, the funding of entitlements has been through an employer levy scheme. The funding act also established the Coal Mining Industry (Long Service Leave Funding) Corporation, which administers the scheme. The funding act provides for the reimbursement of employers where they have made a payment to an eligible employee in respect of the employee’s entitlement to long service leave.

From 1 January 2010, the present industry awards prescribing long service leave will be superseded by modern awards under the Fair Work Act 2009, which are not permitted to include long service leave entitlements. While long service leave entitlements will be preserved through the operation of the National Employment Standards under section 113 of the Fair Work Act after 1 January 2010 they will no longer be award based. As a consequence, from 1 January 2010, employers in the black coal mining industry will not be entitled to reimbursement under the funding act in respect of long service payments they make to employees in respect of the preserved entitlements.

These amendments will address this by ensuring the funding act applies to the preserved entitlements in the Fair Work Act 2009. The amendments also ensure all eligible employees will be entitled to the long-standing existing standard of long service leave for the black coal mining industry as of 1 January 2010.

The bill will include definitions of the ‘black coal mining industry’, ‘employee’ and ‘employer’ and amend the existing definition of ‘eligible employee’, to align with the modern award. These definitions will also apply to related legislation—that is, the Coal Mining Industry (Long Service Leave) Payroll Levy Act 1992 and the Coal Mining Industry (Long Service Leave) Payroll Levy Collection Act 1992.

Industry stakeholders have suggested to the government that these definitions will provide greater certainty as to the scope and
application of the existing scheme. The government considers that these proposals by industry participants are sensible and is happy to facilitate them by making these minor amendments.

The effect of this bill is to preserve existing arrangements for employees in the black coal mining industry with respect to long service leave and also ensure the reimbursement of employers from the fund in respect to long service leave payments they make to eligible employees.

The government considers that this is a desirable measure that recognises the unique historical circumstances surrounding long service leave in the black coal mining industry.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Haase) adjourned.

APPROPRIATION (WATER ENTITLEMENTS AND HOME INSULATION) BILL 2009-2010

Message from the Governor-General transmitting particulars of proposed expenditure and recommending appropriation announced.

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Tanner.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr Tanner (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (9.08 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Appropriation (Water Entitlements and Home Insulation) Bill 2009-2010 provides urgent funding to cover rebate payments made under the home insulation program and departmental costs associated with the acceleration of the water buybacks within the Murray-Darling Basin system that are addressed in a further bill to be introduced shortly.

The measures provided for in this bill allow administered funding of $695.8 million for the home insulation program to be brought forward (from 2010-11) and departmental funds of $4.9 million to be brought forward ($4.4 million from 2013-14 and $0.5 million from 2014-15) from the Water for the Future—Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin program.

The $695.8 million for the home insulation program is part of the $985.8 million bring forward of funding included in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2009-10. The remaining $290 million is required less urgently and will be included in the 2009-10 Additional Estimates Appropriation Bill (No.3).

The home insulation program has seen unprecedented demand from householders, with over half a million homes being insulated to date. The uptake level has exceeded initial expectations for the program.

The bill requires immediate passage as the administered appropriations provided to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts for 2009-10 are close to being exhausted. Based on the current take-up rate under the home insulation program, the 2009-10 appropriation will be exhausted by late December 2009.

The current uptake rate for the program is another positive confirmation of the success of one of the government’s stimulus package measures in supporting jobs in not only the manufacturing industry but also installer job creation and associated logistics. The rate of expenditure is in keeping with providing rapid job support and economic stimulus. Improved energy efficiency for Australian households is also being delivered.
The departmental costs within this bill are for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and will provide adequate resourcing to efficiently implement the government’s water purchase program in 2009-10. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Haase) adjourned.

**APPROPRIATION (WATER ENTITLEMENTS) BILL 2009-2010**

Message from the Governor-General transmitting particulars of proposed expenditure and recommending appropriation announced.

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Tanner.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr Tanner (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (9.11 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Appropriation (Water Entitlements) Bill 2009-2010 requests urgent funding for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to accelerate water buybacks within the Murray-Darling Basin system.

The measures provided for in the bill will enable $650 million for water buybacks to be brought forward from later years of the Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin program under Water for the Future.

The objective of the Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin program is to purchase water entitlements to restore the environmental health of the Murray-Darling Basin system and to smooth the transition to the lower sustainable diversion limits anticipated in the new Basin Plan. To date, the Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin program has secured the purchase of more than 600 gigalitres of water entitlements.

The funding bring forward in this bill will enable a further acceleration of environmental water purchasing and provide for new water purchase initiatives in 2009-10.

The total appropriation sought in this bill is $650 million, comprising:

- $320 million, which the Minister for Climate Change and Water announced on 3 November 2009, and which was included in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2009-10, brought forward from 2010-11 ($220 million) and 2011-12 ($100 million); and
- a further $330 million, brought forward from 2010-11 ($100 million), 2011-12 ($100 million) and 2013-14 ($130 million), to provide for additional water buybacks in 2009-10, and which has been decided since MYEFO 2009-10.

The bill requires immediate passage. The administered appropriations currently provided to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts are not sufficient to cover the cost of trades that are likely to be offered to the government under the water purchase program in 2009-10. With the additional appropriation, vendors will receive timely settlement of their water trades under the Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin program.

Departmental costs of $4.9 million will also be provided to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to support the accelerated water buybacks. The departmental funding is outlined in the Appropriation (Water Entitlements and Home Insulation) Bill 2009-2010.

Debate (on motion by Mr Haase) adjourned.
Second Reading

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (9.15 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Australia faces a key challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while ensuring energy security. This government is committed to implementing a comprehensive response to reduce Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, with technology playing a vital role.

The Australian government believes that the development of affordable and efficient low-emission and renewable energy technologies is crucial to addressing this challenge. It is important that a sensible approach is taken to the development of these technologies; there is no simple, ‘one size fits all’ technology that can be applied, either within Australia or globally. The world requires a variety of different clean energy technologies, reflecting different local attributes and circumstances, to draw upon if it is to address this massive challenge.

The government’s efforts to develop these new low-emissions energy technologies are directed towards a few broad areas: energy efficiency, low-emissions coal and renewable energy sources.

Australia is lucky to possess many outstanding renewable energy resources—sun, wind, geothermal, biomass and ocean, just to name a few. While many of these renewable energy sources offer great potential, their reliability must increase and their generation costs must decrease if they are to make a significant contribution to increasing Australian and global energy security. The Australian government is focusing on these issues so that renewable energy sources can play a key role in the Australian and global energy mix.

The Australian government has made an unprecedented commitment to the development of new low-emissions coal and renewable energy technologies. In May this year, the government announced its $4.5 billion Clean Energy Initiative. The Clean Energy Initiative contains three key elements to support the research, development and demonstration of low-emission and renewable energy technologies, being:

- firstly, the Carbon Capture and Storage Flagships Program, involving funding to support the construction and demonstration of large-scale integrated carbon capture and storage projects in Australia;
- secondly, the Solar Flagships Program, involving funding to support the construction and demonstration of large-scale solar power stations in Australia; and
- thirdly, the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy, or ACRE.

These initiatives, along with others already underway, will create a world-class portfolio of Australian clean energy technology projects.

The Clean Energy Initiative will complement the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and expanded renewable energy target, which will deliver 20 per cent renewable energy generated by 2020. The expanded renewable energy target provides a strong incentive to accelerate the uptake of Australia’s abundant renewable energy sources. However, there are significant technical and commercial issues facing the renewable energy industry that cannot be solved by the
operation of the expanded renewable energy target alone. These issues require a complementary effort to develop promising renewable energy and enabling technologies to a point where they can be competitive with existing energy technologies.

It is here that ACRE fills the gap. It provides an injection of funds to help develop and commercialise emerging renewable and enabling energy technologies.

Australian government support for renewable energy technologies has not been well coordinated, as it has historically been delivered across a range of agencies. This fragmented approach has the potential to confuse industry stakeholders and lead to inefficiencies in delivery.

It is clear that there needs to be more done in a coordinated focus on renewable energy technology support. That is why the government is establishing ACRE as the national renewable energy technology body.

ACRE’s objectives will be to promote the development, commercialisation and deployment of renewable energy and enabling technologies and to improve their competitiveness. It will achieve this by:

(a) developing and implementing a funding strategy capable of supporting projects along the innovation chain;

(b) encouraging additional investments, including investments from the private sector and state and territory governments;

(c) managing the cost effective delivery of government-funded renewable energy and enabling technology programs;

(d) providing support and advice to governments, industry and the community on renewable energy and enabling technologies, strategies and related issues when requested;

(e) fostering collaboration between governments, industry and the research community on renewable energy projects;

(f) supporting growth in skills and capacity in renewable technologies for the domestic and international markets; and

(g) any other activities that it is directed to undertake by the government to support renewable energy and enabling technologies.

ACRE will be a one-stop shop for Australian renewable energy businesses, drawing together more than $560 million of renewable energy investment. ACRE will also have money for new initiatives, including funds that were allocated to the formerly envisaged Clean Energy Program. The focus for new investments will be on the development, commercialisation and deployment of promising renewable energy and enabling technologies to help improve their competitiveness in the market.

In terms of existing renewable energy technology programs, ACRE will consolidate the following:

- the Renewable Energy Demonstration Program;
- the $15 million Second Generation Biofuels Research and Development Program;
- the $50 million Geothermal Drilling Program;
- the $20 million Advanced Electricity Storage Technologies program;
- the $14 million Wind Energy Forecasting Capability program; and
- finally, the $18 million Renewable Energy Equity Fund.

This consolidation of Australian government renewable energy and enabling technology programs has many advantages, including:

- firstly, it will benefit stakeholders such as researchers and industry as there will now be one central point of government
contact for renewable energy technology development;
• secondly, it will also allow for better tracking and benchmarking of outcomes; and
• thirdly, it will centralise information on support for renewable energy technologies.

ACRE will consist of three important elements:
• an independent advisory board, which will provide expert advice to the government;
• staff from my department who will support the board; and
• a chief executive officer (CEO) who will report to the secretary of my department and who will be an ex-officio member of the board.

The bill I am introducing today establishes the ACRE board and the position of CEO.

The membership of the board will draw upon the significant talent we already have in the Australian industry and research community. It is critical that the board employs a wide variety of expertise to maximise the return on the government’s investment in these key energy technologies.

The key job of the board will be to advise the government about how to best support the development of renewable energy and enabling technologies along the innovation chain.

I will be appointing up to six non-executive members to the board, plus a non-executive chair. Members will be chosen for their high-level skills in areas such as research, venture capital, intellectual property, commercialisation and other fields relevant to the board’s functions. They will then bring their knowledge and experience forward in advising the government. The term of appointment will not exceed two years.

As I mentioned earlier, ACRE’s objective is to promote renewable energy and enabling technologies and to improve their competitiveness in Australia. The board will help to achieve this objective by advising the government on:
• firstly, strategies to fund and promote renewable energy technologies;
• secondly, funding of promising projects and measures;
• thirdly, management of programs and the improvement of existing program delivery;
• fourthly, provision of venture capital funding; and,
• finally, priority areas for government support.

In relation to advising on the funding of renewable energy and enabling technology projects and measures, the board will first apply its expertise in assessing projects and measures which have been referred to it for consideration by government.

I will be asking the board to take an innovative approach in providing advice on the design of these strategies and their underpinning programs to ensure that we get the most out of the investments that the government makes over the next few years.

The board will also establish links with state and territory government agencies and the private sector with a view to developing strategies for stimulating investment in renewable energy technologies. This is a real opportunity for state and territory governments and the business community to join with the Australian government in a common goal.

I expect that the board will manage its affairs in a manner reflecting the highest stan-
dards of probity and the highest ethical standards and governance practices. The legislation includes provisions to help achieve these standards.

The bill also establishes the position of the chief executive officer, who will be recruited to round out the leadership team for ACRE. The chief executive officer will be an ex-officio member of the board and will run ACRE on a day-to-day basis. This person will have an understanding of the issues facing the industry and very strong stakeholder management skills.

In summary, the establishment of ACRE is a significant step forward in the development of affordable and efficient renewable energy and enabling technologies. If Australia is to play its part in addressing the global challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions while increasing energy security, it will need to make a significant contribution to the development of a suite of viable renewable energy technologies. ACRE will be central to this contribution.

I commend the bill to the House. I express my appreciation to all the departmental staff who were involved in the preparation of this bill at short notice.

Debate (on motion by Mr Haase) adjourned.

ACIS ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (APPLICATION) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Martin Ferguson, for Dr Emerson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (9.27 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The ACIS Administration Amendment (Application) Bill 2009 confirms that the commencement date for the ACIS Administration Amendment Act 2009 is 1 January 2010.

The government’s New Car Plan for a Greener Future committed to providing the motor vehicle producers with a smooth transition to the new Automotive Transformation Scheme by providing increased assistance under ACIS in 2010. It was also the government’s decision that this additional assistance be conditional on the enactment of the Automotive Transformation Scheme Act 2009, which occurred on 29 September 2009.

The amendment corrects the unintended consequence arising from the link between the ACIS Administration Amendment Act 2009 and the commencement of the Automotive Transformation Scheme Act 2009.

This bill clarifies that the commencement date for the ACIS act is 1 January 2010.

The amendments to the ACIS Administration Amendment Act 2009 also include an application provision to make it explicit that additional assistance to be provided to the motor vehicle producers is limited to their production of motor vehicles, engines and engine components from 1 January 2010. It removes any uncertainty that the new provisions could be applied to production of motor vehicles, engines and engine components undertaken in the final three months of 2009 for which duty credits will be issued in the first three months of 2010.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Haase) adjourned.
Debate resumed from 17 November, on motion by Mr Clare:

That this bill be now read a second time.

upon which Dr Southcott moved by way of amendment:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: “whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House:

(1) is concerned that 71,500 young Australians have lost their jobs since the election of the Rudd Government;
(2) expresses its concern that 108,300 full-time jobs have been lost amongst young Australians over the last 12 months;
(3) notes that commencements among traditional trade apprentices have fallen by 21.2 per cent in the 12 months to March 2009;
(4) notes that the proportion of young Australians not in full-time education or full-time employment has risen under this Government;
(5) condemns the Government for abolishing Green Corps as a youth development program;
(6) is concerned that the Minister for Employment Participation believes that six month work experience placements are a substitute for a job;
(7) calls on the Government to outline how many new green jobs were in the Prime Minister’s announcement to the Australian Labor Party National Conference on 30 July;
(8) calls on the Government to outline how many green jobs will be created in this term of Parliament; and
(9) calls on the Government to outline its strategy to create jobs for young Australians”.

Mr BRADbury (Lindsay) (9.29 am)—I rise in support of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supple-
Programs of this sort are particularly important in the current economic climate. We know from experience and certainly from the most recent recessions that this country experienced back in the 1990s and the early 1980s that young people are the ones hit hardest by the economic downturn. Whilst we have managed to avoid a recession in this downturn, there is no question that the impacts of the downturn are being felt by young people in many respects more so than others. One statistic that pays tribute to this is that 40 per cent of those who have contributed to the increase in unemployment over the last 12 months have been young people. So it is important that, in acknowledging that young people are bearing a particular burden—a particularly disproportionate burden—of the economic downturn, we have programs and measures in place that provide assistance to young people throughout these periods.

I can see many similarities between the National Green Jobs Corps program and the Green Corps program that was previously in existence, which was a good program. In some respects, the changes that have been made or the points of difference between the Green Corps program and the National Green Jobs Corps program actually support the proposition that the new program has enhanced or improved some of the elements of the old program. If we have a look at the differences between the two programs we can see that one of the biggest differences between the old Green Corps program and the National Green Jobs Corps program is the size. If we look at the Green Corps program as it existed, it really only funded in the vicinity of 1,700 places annually whereas the new program funds 5,000 places a year, or up to 10,000 places over the next two years. Clearly, this is a program of much greater scale and I would suggest that, coming over
the next two-year period, it is coming at a
time when it is most needed.

Another point of difference is the target
group of the National Green Jobs Corps pro-
gram. Whilst there was not necessarily the
same focus in the old Green Corps program,
the new National Green Jobs Corps program
will be very much targeted at those young
people who have not completed a year 12 or
equivalent qualification. I think in the con-
text of the discussion that we have just had,
and the comments I have just made in rela-
tion to the fact that young people do gener-
ally bear the brunt of an economic downturn
in a disproportionately high way, it is impor-
tant that we first help those who require as-
sistance in improving their skills. Clearly, if
you do not have a year 12 or equivalent
qualification you will fit into that category of
job seeker who is most vulnerable. That is
why measures of this sort are so critical.

Another difference between the old Green
Corps program and the new National Green
Jobs Corps program is the requirement for
accredited training. Whilst, in my experi-
ence, many of the Green Corps programs did
in fact involve securing a qualification that
was nationally recognised, that was not al-
ways the case. But under this program that
will be the case and I think that is a good
thing. It is a good thing because it ensures
that this is not just a work experience pro-
gram; it is a program that genuinely leaves
the participants with not only an increase in
their skills but skills that are nationally rec-
ognised and a qualification that reflects that.
I think all of these measures manage to
strength what was a good program in the
old Green Corps program, but they also
strength that program for the benefit of
those who will become participants and the
community more generally.

I would like to take this opportunity to re-
fect upon some of the activities that partici-
pants in the Green Corps program were in-
volved in within my local community. I have
had the opportunity to work closely with
some of the projects that have been under-
taken in my local community. A couple of
projects at the eastern end of my electorate in
the St Marys area, the Oxley Park area, have
been undertaken. This is work that has gen-
erally been undertaken along South Creek
and Ropes Creek, two of the significant ri-
parian corridors throughout Western Sydney.
These corridors are significant not only for
their biodiversity but when it comes to the
history of our nation, having been places
where the first interactions between white
and Indigenous Australians occurred. It cre-
ates some consternation and some bother for
me when I see the level of disrepair—not
just disrepair but the extent to which foreign
and noxious weeds have started to overrun
the riparian zones—that these waterways
have descended to. These matters cause me
great concern. When it comes to our natural
history they are not only important natural
assets in our local community but also meet-
ing places of significance.

That is why I was very pleased to see
some of the projects that were undertaken by
Greening Australia under the leadership of
two fine individuals. The team leaders that
they had running these programs were Jess
Pippen and Janne Anderberg. They were out-
standing leaders—people who have a passion
not only for horticulture but for training
young people. I saw some tremendous re-
results. Those results could be seen not just in
the course of the environmental repair that
was undertaken over the 26-week period of
each of those programs but in the real im-
provement in the outlook, the skills and,
most importantly, I believe, the confidence
of the participants who were involved in
those programs. Having seen the participants
at the start of the program and then having
returned at the end of the 26-week period for
the graduation ceremonies I noticed the difference. It was visible, it was clear and it was evident to me that, in the course of the 26 weeks, each of the individuals involved had benefited greatly from these programs and, of course, the community benefit was considerable.

I just want to make one additional point. When I identified the range of projects that the National Green Jobs Core program will fund I mentioned community education as one of those components. I think that this is important, and I just want to reflect upon some of the activities of the Green Corps groups that I have just spoken about and the impact that they have had. Greening Australia and their teams out at Ropes Creek have been involved on occasions in activities at Mamre Homestead, which is a significant local homestead, a significant historic building within our local community. It was once the home of Reverend Samuel Marsden. In a historic sense, it is an icon in our local community. There are many good things occurring at Mamre Homestead, some of which involve the preservation of the architectural history that is contained within the building. There are significant Aboriginal places on that site and it is also a significant site environmentally.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge Sister Mary Louise and her team at Mamre Homestead for the great work that they do there. The partnership that emerged from discussions between the Green Corps team and Sister Mary Louise and her team involved in the Mamre project led to some of the young participants in this program leading the Frogs and Furry Discovery Tours at Mamre Homestead. The Frogs and Furry Discovery Tours are a matter of some interest to me, because my children had the opportunity to participate in those activities. What came of that was an opportunity for young people, in obtaining skills themselves, to take young children along on tours, impart some knowledge and wisdom and show them some of the natural wonders of our local community. So the benefits that have flowed from programs of this sort are considerable and extend well beyond the confidence and the other job skill considerations that we often talk about in these matters.

I also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of MTC Work Solutions and, in particular, Job Futures, who were carrying out the program at Huntington Reserve, which is on the other side of my electorate, on the other side of the Nepean River. Huntington Reserve and Hollier oval are areas that in part provide recreational assets to the local community but also in part reflect a lack of care from the local community in preserving some of our natural creeks and waterways. The work that was undertaken there—and I acknowledge Steven Fleischmann from MTC Work Solutions, who was the coordinator, and his team—really has lifted the appearance of that area. It has made it accessible. In the course of clearing out noxious weeds, the team also secured pathways that now give local residents the opportunity to walk through that area, an area through which previously no one would have considered trying to run the gauntlet. The Green Corps team out there have done a great job and I acknowledge their great efforts.

I should note some of the activities they were involved with that were not of a strictly environmental character. The team undertook some fundraising activities. They ran a barbecue down at Bunnings and various other activities. As a result of the funds that they raised and as part of their overall program of works, they undertook some works at a local nursing home and retirement village—a renovation rescue, if you like, a makeover of the garden of that nursing home. I know that that provided great pleasure to the residents.
of that home. It also gave the young participants an opportunity to meet and interact with some of the elderly residents at the home.

These are some of the benefits that will flow from programs like the National Green Job Corps program. It is important to acknowledge, as we are doing through this bill, the efforts of those involved in this program, so that they are not just receiving the allowances that they would otherwise receive but also receiving an additional supplement in recognition of the costs that they will incur, particularly the travel costs in getting to the job each day. This is a good bill. It is a bill that supports an important supplement which is an important part of a significant program. I wish to add my voice in support of the bill.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.48 am)—It was pleasing to hear the previous speaker complimenting the previous Green Corps program, which came about under the former coalition government. The National Green Jobs Corps, under this Labor government, is basically a Work for the Dole program with a green bent. It is a shadow of the highly successful Green Corps program, which was axed by this government. Green Corps was established as a volunteer youth development and environmental training program, giving young people the opportunity to help preserve the environment and Australia’s cultural heritage. It was a program based on the successful Work for the Dole program, which was actually piloted in the electorate of Gilmore under the auspices of the equally successful but now defunct organisation the Shoalhaven Area Consultative Committee.

As a vehicle to encourage unemployed youth into work, it had no peer as far as programs in Gilmore were concerned. Something like in excess of 70 per cent of participants went on to gainful employment after picking up invaluable work skills, contacts and, most of all, motivation. As it was a voluntary program, the people who engaged with Green Corps had the ambition to better themselves. Not only did the participants help themselves but also they helped our local environment in practical terms and helped raise awareness of environmental issues. Thousands of trees were planted, hundreds of kilometres of fences were erected, acres of land were refurbished and tonnes of weeds were removed. It also brought together farmers, oyster growers and Landcare groups, a most unlikely mix. The publicity from their activities helped the public to understand some of the more common issues with the local environment, such as land degradation, weeds, fencing to minimise the impact of stock, revegetation and why trees need to be planted.

I have lost track of the number of projects that I have launched since the inception of the program in 1996, but I well remember the infectious enthusiasm of its youthful participants, not to mention those who ran the program in Ulladulla, Kiama and Nowra, groups such as the YWCA—and I sincerely thank them for their participation over the years—and the Milton-Ulladulla Landcare group, just to name two. Working in partnership, they gave the participants the drive and determination to succeed. It was my practice to shout dinner after the end of each project, as an acknowledgement of the contribution of these fine young Australians—who came from all walks of the community—as long as they had stayed together as a team for the six months. Of course we excused those who had got a job in the meantime.

The program targeted the 17- to 20-year-olds. The major difference between the Labor government’s replacement program and its predecessor is that participants will be paid a training supplement and it has been opened to 17- to 25-year-olds. The program was trumpeted as creating 10,000 new jobs,
but the initial euphoria cooled and the minister has now taken to calling these jobs ‘work experience’. Whilst the creation of green jobs is a commendable goal, there is no guarantee that the work experience will result in a transition to a real green job. Nobody has yet actually defined what a green job is, so the government has ample latitude to creatively work towards its target.

Because this new program does not start until the new year, until we see it in practice we will have no idea how it is going to run or where it will be located. I just hope the government realises that Gilmore is part of the Illawarra, as there have been forums held there and, as the federal member, I have not been invited. However, we can only speculate hopefully that the National Green Jobs Corps will follow the path of Green Corps, because that was such a fruitful program. Concerns have already been raised that the new program is vulnerable to creative contortions to assist placement agencies in meeting their funding objectives. Due to the structuring of payments to participating agencies, it has been suggested that, should the participants leave the project to take up paid employment and not be replaced, the training providers will also lose funding.

Greening Australia’s South Australian CEO, Mark Anderson, has already suggested a way around the problem by taking programs beyond the prescribed 26-week period of work experience. Were such an option widely adopted then surely that would add to the cost of running the program. The supplement, when combined with participants’ income support payments, is less than the amount participants received under the previous Green Corps program but it is a doubling of the Work for the Dole equivalent. To me, the big difference is that the Work for the Dole program is mandatory but with Green Corps you have actually got people who want it to work. Even so, will the supplement cover individuals’ out-of-pocket expenses for getting involved to make the exercise financially worth while? The amount of $41.60 a fortnight is probably ample if a participant only works on the program one day a fortnight, but its value would certainly erode rapidly for multiple days over the course of a fortnight. So it is fair to ask whether the supplement constitutes a reasonable incentive for the target group to join in the program.

Section 556B(2) of the bill says that a person will be paid the supplement for each fortnight that contains a day on which the person has participated in the program in the previous fortnight. Frankly, I cannot see the point of participating in the program for any more than one day a fortnight if that is the criterion for getting a supplement allowance. Green Corps participants often stay on the location for days, just to get the job done. I have little dispute with the provision of the bill, but I will reserve my judgment on the effectiveness of the program until it is up and running. There is a paucity of detail on the mechanics, but if it is as effective as that of Green Corps then I will certainly be happy. The test of this program is whether it will lead to real jobs after this period of work experience. The government’s promise of creating 50,000 new Green Corps jobs is a big call—and, for the sake of our young unemployed, I wish them all the best. But tell us: how many green jobs are for the Gilmore electorate, and where and when will they start? I have a final question for the government. If a person engages in this program are they technically employed or will they still be counted as unemployed? If they are to be excised from the rollcall of the unemployed then I congratulate the government on its creativity.

In finishing my comments, I want to thank all those who have participated in the past, particularly the Milton-Ulladulla landown-
ers, the local farmers—it was a big call for our local farmers to be involved in the previous Green Corps jobs—and certainly our oyster growers. But most of all I would like to thank our local YWCA, who did such a superb job of contracting these Green Corps jobs in the electorate of Gilmore.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (9.55 am)—I am pleased to speak in support of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. This bill introduces a new supplement to assist low-skilled job seekers as they take part in the youth environmental work experience program National Green Jobs Corps. This is a terrific program giving young job seekers hands-on work experience and the opportunity to conserve and preserve Australia’s natural environment, particularly in urban areas.

I have met the Green Corps crew down at Rocky Waterholes at Salisbury in my electorate a couple of times at graduation ceremonies and the like. They are a terrific bunch of young people who are eager to learn new skills and contribute to the community, to Australia and even beyond. At Rocky Waterholes there are 10 young people working to restore a creek. This creek goes through Rocklea, near Archerfield Aerodrome, so it is an urban part of the city of Brisbane. It is surrounded by factories and it has really gone bad over the last 50 or 100 years. These young people are working to regenerate local native plant species through weeding, planting and water quality monitoring. When you plant native species, it brings back native wildlife. It also gets rid of the weeds that continue to propagate and go all through the watercourse. It is amazing to see the different stages at the Rocky Waterholes and how much change has taken place with these young people working together. There are before and after photographs. You can see that the parts of the creek they had not yet worked on were an incredible wilderness with car wrecks, lantana and every introduced weed you can think of. But what they have turned it into is incredible. These young people are also helping to increase community awareness of the value of our natural resources and to build an appreciation of the variety of plants and wildlife that can populate the Oxley Creek catchment area.

As well as their work along the creek, the participants are also receiving accredited training in courses such as conservation and land management and occupational health and safety. Obviously these things are very important, because they are using scrub-cutters, whipper-snippers and heavy equipment down on the creek. They are picking up skills that are easily transferable. Ultimately, this training is designed to lead to full-time work opportunities. When you talk to these guys they are often not as engaged as most young people at school. Because of their new-found ability to work as a team and to take on a task and stick with it—to get out of bed every day and come along and do some hard yakka down on the creek—they have acquired confidence and skills. These guys, both males and females, talk about acquiring new skills and taking them overseas. It is amazing the difference a little bit of guidance from the government can make.

As I said, this bill introduces a supplement to help support participants in the Green Corps. It will be available to youth allowance, Newstart and parenting payment recipients who take part in the program. They will receive an extra $41.60 per fortnight. I understand that this will cost about $3.7 million over the life of the program. As I detailed earlier, it is money very well spent. It is a good seed investment that will help develop good taxpayers and good contributing members of society. It will be a useful incentive to encourage more young people aged 17 to 24 to take part in programs such as this.
The payment will also help cover the costs incurred in participating in the program, such as travel. Many of the participants have not yet saved up to buy a car, and sometimes public transport can be a bit of a problem because of the hours at which they start. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, in the Queensland environment it is a good idea to start nice and early, before the sun starts to bake. A program like this is very important for young people, particularly those who are unemployed and those who struggle with traditional education and training regimes. They can not only gain skills on the job but learn a work ethic, gain self-confidence and a sense of achievement and can walk tall to their next job interview.

And they are making a real and lasting difference to our environment. Green Corps participants have propagated and planted more than 15 million trees—I will say that again: 15 million trees—removed thousands of hectares of weeds like lantana, put up more than 8½ thousand kilometres of fencing, collected more than 11,000 kilograms of seeds, and built or maintained more than 6,000 kilometres of walking tracks and boardwalks. These are valuable blows against dangerous and extreme climate change, and there is much more to come. This training supplement will be available for participants for two years, from 1 January 2010 until 31 December 2011. Before I finish, I understand that this supplement has been advertised and is expected to begin from 1 January next year. It is important that the parliament pass this bill this year to ensure eligible recipients can receive the supplement.

I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment for introducing this legislation and this scheme. It is obviously a scheme that allows young people a second chance. Because they were not particularly engaged in school, this is another opportunity for them excel, to pick up some skills and to pick up some teamwork strengths and to make some mates as well. They are people who possibly are not engaged at school, but they are able to come together, work out how to get ahead, work out how to change an environment and make these creeks and similar areas more useful for the community. I commend the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment for introducing this legislation and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (10.01 am)—In joining the debate on Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009, I would like to state my overall support for the program that has been announced by the government. I suppose there is no surprise in that regard considering the opposition implemented a very similar—almost identical—system when it was in government as a work experience and training system. Apart from that, there are a few key points I would like to make as part of my contribution to this debate. Firstly, I want to state quite clearly that this is not a green jobs program, as the government has attempted to spin it in the wider community; it is a work experience and a training initiative. Secondly, I make the point that more needs to be done to address the rising tide of youth unemployment in my electorate and throughout regional Australia. Finally, I make the point that this government has to stop the rhetoric about green jobs and start investing in the people who are doing the practical environmental work in our region right now—those being the Landcare facilitators and coordinators who face an uncertain future under this government’s quite euphemistically named Caring for our Country policy.

I will begin with the details of the bill before the House. The bill amends the Social Security Act 1991 to allow a training supplement of $41.60 per fortnight to be paid to...
participants in the program who receive Newstart allowance, youth allowance or parenting payments. From January next year the program will allow for up to 10,000 young people to develop skills in environmental projects through 26 weeks of accredited training and work experience. These words have been taken from the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment’s second reading speech, so there is no question that it is a work experience and training program. It is simply not a jobs initiative as the government has tried to portray it in the community.

Having said that, I am a strong supporter of work experience within my community, particularly for the longer term unemployed. It is important to give young people the opportunity to develop their skills. Just as important though is to create a work ethic for those people who have not necessarily had that opportunity. The discipline of getting up and going to work on a daily basis, the pride that it gives them for contributing something important to our community through initiatives like a green corps program is something that the government is quite right in pursuing. As I said, it was an initiative of the previous government which, from my experience, was very successful in the broader Gippsland community. It does give purpose to young people’s lives while they are looking for more permanent work and, as I said earlier, it also makes them feel part of the community, that they are making a contribution, and that is one of the most important aspects of these programs. But in terms of actual employment outcomes, I fear that the Green Jobs Corps, as it is portrayed, is more spin than real job outcomes at the end of it. It remains to be seen whether we will ever see this turn into real jobs. As I will indicate later, given the government’s cuts to Landcare funding, I have doubts about the government’s commitment to practical environmental work in a paid capacity.

The sort of work experience that young people receive is going to be critical to the success of the program. It depends entirely on the quality of the projects that are put forward by the community, and also the approach taken by the department and the minister in what they approve. I hope there is going to be a rigorous commitment to real environment initiatives and not some mickey mouse projects that do not actually achieve environmental outcomes. I am referring to the parliamentary secretary’s second reading speech, where he indicates that the type of work experience and training projects will be along the lines of:

- Bush regeneration
- Erosion control
- Developing community information and education projects
- Beach and dune rehabilitation
- Habitat protection

He goes on to say:

These projects will make environmental improvements now and help develop green skills that will increasingly be needed in the labour market of the future.

Participants in the National Green Jobs Corps will undertake work experience and skill development, including 130 hours of accredited training leading to a nationally recognised qualification.

So it is positive to see that young people will emerge from this program with a nationally recognised qualification. That is a definite step forward for the program participants. In addition to doing something positive for their communities, the participants will become more employable at its conclusion if the program meets the guidelines as pointed out by the parliamentary secretary.

As I said at the outset, the rising tide of youth unemployment is a major concern in Gippsland and throughout regional Australia. The shadow minister, the member for Boothby, highlighted this concern during his
contribution to the debate on the bill before us and he correctly pointed out:

Youth unemployment is not receiving anywhere near the amount of attention it deserves.

... ... ...

The rate of unemployment for teenagers who are not in full-time education has risen to 18½ per cent in 2009, up from 12.2 per cent in 2008.

I fear that the rate in Gippsland and the La-trobe Valley is much higher. Also we have a concern in my community that the youth unemployment rate is hidden to a large extent because so many of our young people who cannot find work in our communities are forced to move away to seek opportuni-ties in larger cities. So the youth unemploy-ment rate in regional areas is hidden to a large extent.

The shadow minister made some very good points in his address when he pointed out that around 295,000 young Australians who are not in full-time education are not in the labour force or are unemployed. I will just quote from his speech:

What we do know is that those people who do not make a good transition from school, who spend periods outside the labour force, not in full-time education and unemployed, will have a very inter-mittent work history throughout life. So youth unemployment is an area that needs a lot more attention from the Rudd government. All of those young Australians who voted for Kevin07 two years ago would never have dreamed how much their opportunities would dry up under this gov-ernment. We see that the Rudd Labor government has no strategy to create actual jobs for young Australians.

That is a real concern in my community. While I welcome the Green Jobs Corps ini-tiative as a positive step, the government does need to go a lot further in terms of its strategy for youth unemployment. This is very much a green work experience program and it is not a jobs program, as I indicated previously. That is not to say that it does not have the potential to do a great deal of good work in the community. I urge the govern-ment to stop trying to spin everything that it puts out there and actually just let the results speak for themselves. If the program works, the community will embrace it and it will look for an extension of it in the years ahead.

I spoke quite recently in the House about my concerns relating to youth unemployment in Gippsland in the broader sense and the lack of support services which exist for young people. I am seeking clarification from the minister in relation to allegations of cuts to Centrelink funding for specialised youth workers who assist the long-term un-employed in regional areas like Gippsland. Youth unemployment is very much a special-ist area, as I am sure you are aware, Mr Dep-uty Speaker Scott, in your own community. You need to build trust with young people.

There is a lot of one-to-one support to help them through whatever issues they may have in their lives beyond just the need to secure work. They can be quite high-maintenance clients for the Centrelink staff in terms of getting them to turn up to programs or getting them to apply for jobs and getting them back engaged in the community. A lot of them have dropped out of school for a whole variety of reasons. There are often some under-lying social issues involved.

I urge the government to ensure that fund-ing is provided to support this specialised assistance, which is required for young un-employed people, particularly in regional areas. If we lose these young people at a young age, we actually lose them for life. We have a real problem in parts of my electorate where we have generations of welfare de-pendancy—where the young people have not had the opportunity to see a positive role model getting up and going to work every day. It becomes very difficult to break that cycle. There is potential with a program like the Green Jobs Corps to start breaking that
cycle and getting young people engaged and developing those work ethics I referred to earlier.

I do have some concerns about the quite restrictive nature of the eligibility criteria of the Green Jobs Corps program and the fact that there will not necessarily be jobs available at the end of this work experience unless the government changes in its policy direction in relation to practical environmental work, which I will refer to again later on. The criteria of 18- to 24-year-olds—and I think there are 10,000 places in the initial announcement—I do not believe will go far enough in the longer term. I would encourage the government to consider that. With the likelihood of the community embracing this initiative, there is going to be a need to extend it and probably extend the eligibility criteria as well.

One area I am particularly concerned about is the possibility of the government considering special exemptions to broaden the criteria for newly arrived immigrants. We have a situation in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley at the moment where we have had quite a strong influx in recent times of Sudanese refugees. It is a situation where a lot of them have been processed, have moved to Australia, have had their first move to a suburban area and have not enjoyed the experience, have heard that there is housing available, particularly in the Latrobe Valley, and have made that move only to find there is not much work available for them there. The availability of affordable housing has been the carrot, if you like, but when they have arrived they have found that there is not a great deal of employment opportunity. I fear that we have a situation brewing in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley which may be a significant social and economic concern to our wider community. These people are ready, willing and able to work, but we need to help them take that first step and get some practical experience of working in the Australian environment.

I think one real opportunity for them may be a program along the lines of a Green Jobs Corps initiative, where there is some supported training, to allow them first of all to get out into the community and meet people, which is always difficult when you have just relocated to a whole new community. There are real opportunities here to build some positive spirit within the community directed towards the refugee population in the sense that, if they are seen to be out in the community doing some positive and practical environmental work in this case, it will be well received by the broader Gippsland and Latrobe Valley communities, keeping in mind that there are large sections of my community recovering from the bushfires of early this year. The bushfire rehabilitation task is enormous and, to the government’s credit, there has been some additional funding allocated for some projects in that regard. But there needs to be recognition that the Sudanese community in this case is going to need some specialised assistance to integrate into the Latrobe Valley community. This is one area where the government could look at the eligibility criteria of the Green Jobs Corps, look at the age criteria as well and perhaps look at whether there is an opportunity to expand the criteria and to provide that level of intensive assistance which I think the Sudanese community in particular are going to need in the months and years ahead as they become established and go on to become highly valued and much respected members of our broader community. As we all appreciate, the key to settling into regional communities is the decency of a job and being able to pay your own bills and afford your own home. That is one area where I think we are letting down these new settlers to our region. We have not been able to provide
them with the work that they so desperately want.

We have many opportunities in my region for the Green Jobs Corps. The government has some real opportunities to work closely with the state government, which has made an absolute mess of its funding of public land management, to leverage off any available projects with the state government in partnership to undertake addressing some important environmental issues. This could be done with a commercial focus, too, in some of our state and national parks, where the tourism infrastructure is so poor. There have been many years of neglect of the public land in the Gippsland region.

While I have spoken about the Sudanese community and their capacity to be involved in Gippsland and particularly in the Latrobe Valley area, further east in the East Gippsland area there are real opportunities to focus a green jobs program like this on our Indigenous community, where the unemployment rate is way beyond the state and national average. The classic example closer to home for me in Lakes Entrance is the Lake Tyers Forest Park on the outskirts of the Lakes Entrance township. The condition of the park facilities there is appalling. There has been a lack of funding by the state government over many years. There is an opportunity here though for the state government, the Green Jobs Corps and our Indigenous community in the Lake Tyers area to work in partnership, to link together in this program to build some positive spirit within our community and to have long-term unemployed people gainfully engaged in the community and carrying out some work which has some benefits for the broader community. There is a natural link to the land in our Indigenous community. They have a great affinity with some of the projects they have undertaken in the past in my region, and there is an opportunity to use that natural affinity to the advantage of the community and to the benefit of Indigenous people.

As I said earlier, it is so important that what comes out of this Green Jobs Corps program leads to real work at the completion of the training stage. Apart from the eligibility criteria, I am concerned that the government is really in the process of downgrading in general its support for practical environmental work through its Caring for our Country program. There is a very strong link between these two initiatives when you consider that the Green Jobs Corps is directed towards areas such as bush regeneration, erosion control, developing community information and education projects, and habitat protection. When you read the list of projects that the Green Jobs Corps is going to be focused on it sounds a lot like Landcare. This government is in the process of gutting Landcare by its refusal to provide guaranteed funding for the network of Landcare facilitators and coordinators who support the more than 100,000 volunteers across the nation. The Green Jobs Corps initiative is about 10,000 work experience program participants. These are volunteers who are unemployed and need a helping hand, and I fully support that. But the government is at the same time refusing to talk about its lack of support for the 100,000 volunteers involved in more than 4,000 community groups across the nation through the Landcare movement.

There is a growing awareness in our community that the government talks a lot about its green credentials but when it comes to rolling up the sleeves and getting the job done—digging the holes, planting the trees, fencing off river banks, controlling feral animals, undertaking the erosion protection work, that hard, physical, practical environmental work—the government goes missing in action. I would like to quote from a letter
in the *Snowy River Mail* from 4 November. It is from Dawn Parker, the Far East Victoria Landcare secretary. Dawn makes some very strong points about where she sees the government’s commitment in relation to environmental projects. She says:

Both the potential for practical environment works and the health and vitality of rural communities are being damaged by the cuts to the number of Landcare facilitators across Victoria.

The role of group facilitators was to be in close contact with local communities to encourage and enable their engagement in natural resource management activities.

She goes on to say:

Recognising the role of volunteers in achieving significant environmental services, successive federal governments invested directly in supplementing volunteer input by funding some paid staff and leveraged even greater attainments. Every government dollar invested in support personnel returns at least three more dollars from local input and co-contributions.

The Caring for our Country business plan endorsed by Messrs Burke and Garrett is undermining the core functioning capacity of Landcare.

Over 50 per cent of Victorian facilitator positions have been lost and more are to go.

Whether by design or through incompetence the vital network of support staff has been effectively dismantled and many Landcare volunteers will reduce their input as their access to information and resources diminish.

Was this what Tony Burke and Peter Garrett intended?

If these outcomes are accidental, how soon will they be undone?

Her letter goes on to say:

Genuine consultation with local communities is needed without bureaucratic intervention.

Repair is needed now.

I recommend that the ministers responsible get a copy of that edition of the *Snowy River Mail* to get an understanding of what Dawn is referring to, because she speaks on behalf of many people throughout the regional communities who are terribly concerned about this government’s lack of commitment to Landcare.

Whenever members on this side of the House criticise a government program we are accused of scaremongering or of simply not understanding what is proposed. I can assure you though that Gippsland’s small army of Landcare volunteers and professional workers understand what is happening to them. I will refer to another quote, from the East Gippsland Landcare Network, and I am happy to provide a copy of it to the ministers so they can read it in its entirety. It says:

Landcare support staff across the country are losing their jobs due to the Australian Government’s ‘Caring for our Country’ grants not funding community facilitation and support. This is because the Caring for our Country grants which Landcare support staff have traditionally relied on did not allocate any funding to the ‘community skills, knowledge and engagement’ section of their business plan even though it is stated as a ‘Priority of Investment’ in the business plan.

Landcare Networks and groups that were not lucky enough to be included in the CMA ‘regional core’ funding had to submit applications in the national ‘competitive’ section of the fund scheme. Out of approx 1300 applications to the government across Australia only 57 were funded (4.3%) leaving many Landcare groups with no funding for on ground run projects let alone to support groups.

It goes on, but time prevents me from going into the full details of the East Gippsland Landcare Network’s submission, but the link to the Green Jobs Corps bill before us is obvious. There will simply be no jobs in practical environmental work for these young people in the future unless the government changes its policies. It is a cruel hoax to get these young people involved and interested in practical environmental work through Green Jobs Corps while at the same time
cutting funding for professional staff involved in Landcare. Landcare volunteers do a mountain of work in my electorate, but the paid support staff are very much the glue which holds it all together. They provide the project management advice and assistance, they provide technical advice to landholders, they generate newsletters to keep everyone informed, they apply for grants and make sure the money is spent according to the guidelines, and they also promote environmental sustainability. They are probably the same people whom the government is going to rely on to be the training coordinators for the Green Jobs Corps program in the first place but right now they are in the process of trying to fight for their own jobs, the facilitation and coordination roles they play with Landcare.

The Landcare volunteers and professional staff who have contacted me have expressed their fears that Landcare groups will not be able to function the same way in the future without guaranteed funding for professional facilitators and coordinators. It is a concern that I share, and I will table a petition in the near future on behalf of my community. Last week more than 200 people rallied in Orbost to raise their concerns and they initiated a petition. The petition, which is in the process of being signed throughout the Gippsland electorate at the moment, calls on the House of Representatives to immediately reinstate the funding of local Landcare facilitators and coordinators in order to allow Landcare groups to function effectively and to address the Caring for our Country priority of community skills, knowledge and engagement.

If the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry thinks that he can ignore these concerns I think he is in for one hell of a shock. As I said, there are more than 100,000 volunteers around Australia and more than 4,000 community groups, and the anger is growing throughout the community. The minister knows about these concerns. I wrote to him about the issue months ago and I have raised it before in the media and in the House. He is defending the government’s decision on the ground that he has the right to set national environmental priorities regardless of community concerns. The minister needs to appreciate that there are people on the ground coming up with local solutions to local problems. They are engaged in the process of practical environmental work and they should have the opportunity to make sure that those projects are undertaken. So I urge the government to make sure it does not make the same mistake with the Green Jobs Corps— (Time expired)

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (10.22 am)—I rise today to support the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. It is another tool in the toolbox that the Rudd government has to combat the rising rate of unemployment that we face in this country. Through no fault of their own, many families and young people throughout the country have lost their jobs or are concerned about losing their jobs as a result of the global recession that grew out of the global financial crisis. That is particularly a problem that we face in Cairns, in Far North Queensland, with unemployment hitting 13.8 per cent in September this year. Sadly, the indications are that it will get worse before it gets better as we go into the wet season and the quieter time of the year for the construction industry and the tourism industry—both foundations of the Cairns economy. It is important that the Rudd government puts in place initiatives to support the economy nationally, but also in local communities like my own, and continues to do work to ensure that we are supporting jobs into the future. That is very much what this legislation is about.

The Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009
will enable a training supplement of $41.60 per fortnight to be paid to participants in the program who receive Newstart allowance, youth allowance or parenting payment. This is important particularly given that many young people are being hit hard by the global recession. As young people leave school and try to get jobs in these times, and there is a lack of jobs, often people with more experience take up the opportunities that may have been available to them in the past. This is particularly the case in Cairns, where the participation rate is high at 71.3 per cent. We have high youth unemployment at 14.6 per cent and teenage unemployment at 27.9 per cent. The National Green Jobs Corps builds on lessons that we learnt during the downturn that we faced in the 1990s. I was involved in some of the programs that were brought forward, LEAP and REAP, which were about engaging young people and getting them involved in tree planting and environmental maintenance work. This initiative will enable us to again engage young people in work that will keep them occupied and get them trained so that they are well placed for a job into the future.

There are a lot of things happening in Cairns in relation to unemployment. I see the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism at the table. I would like to thank him for the support that he provided to my community last year when Qantas cut flights between Cairns and Japan, which hit our local community hard. Working with the minister and the local business community, we were able to put in place a $4 million support package for Cairns, which was very welcome. That provided not only marketing funds but also funds for industry development. Minister Ferguson ensured that Tourism Australia allocated another couple of million of dollars to ensure that we were marketing in the international community, in terms of the work that they were doing to drive tourists back to Cairns.

The tourism industry is still being hit hard. Many young people look for jobs in that industry. It is important that these sorts of measures are brought forward to provide young people with opportunities that may not be in the tourism industry, so that they can get work and provide input into the environmental sector. The environment is very much why people come to tropical North Queensland. We have the Great Barrier Reef and the wet tropical rainforest. I see the member for Herbert here today. I am sure he would nod in agreement that we have some wonderful environmental icons in the far north and in North Queensland.

Mr Lindsay—You keep your hands off my military barracks!

Mr TURNOUR—He is talking about his military base. We have the great HMAS Cairns up there and we really welcome those members of the community. I think the member for Herbert would welcome the fact that we get a lot of people coming to Cairns to visit our region and see the Great Barrier Reef and the wet tropical rainforest. A few more come to Townsville, I must say, which obviously has the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Many of us wonder why it was located there and not in Cairns, but I am sure that is something that we could talk about into the future.

We are talking about jobs. Last week, as a lead-on from the $4 million tourism support package, we launched the tropical North Queensland webpage, cairnsgreatbarrier-reef.org.au, which will be utilised to drive tourists to our local community. It is a portal where people can see the local experiences, whether they be at the reef or the rainforest, white-water rafting, some of the adventure tourism operations, the skyrail or other activities. The National Green Jobs Corps will
play an important role in ensuring that the tourism industry, in terms of the icons that people come to see, is supported through making sure that we are doing work to provide people with jobs in the environment section during this downturn so that people can come to a pristine environment into the future. There are works like improving the Cattana Wetlands, fixing the green- or red-arrow walking tracks, replanting the green corridor along the Barron River or other corridor works that we can do at the Atherton Tablelands, the Cassowary Coast or the Daintree. That will all help us preserve and protect our local environment. They are the sorts of jobs that people working on the Green Jobs Corps can undertake.

This measure will provide another opportunity for people to be engaged in employment. In particular, it is another opportunity for young people who cannot find a job to get involved in work in the environmental area. It will enable them to build on the skills that they have gained already in life or to gain further skills, particularly regarding the environment. The projects will improve the environment now and will help develop green skills that will be used in the labour market in the future. Participants in the National Green Jobs Corps will undertake work experience and skills development, including 130 hours of accredited training, leading to a nationally recognised qualification. To encourage this training, we will provide a training supplement of $41.60 per fortnight to Green Jobs Corps participants on Newstart allowance, youth allowance and parenting payment. Young people with a partial capacity to work or young parents will have their hours of participation tailored to their assessed capacity.

We know that as school finishes there will be young people looking for work, and this is going to be an important measure. As I have said, in Far North Queensland people come to see the environment, but we are doing a range of other things in wanting to support employment up there. The jobs expo is planned for 9 December and I am looking forward to continuing to work with the Minister for Employment Participation, Senator Arbib, and others on this expo to ensure that we have in place a range of jobs across not only the tourism and construction sectors but also the mining and environment areas for young people who are leaving school. The Green Jobs Corps, I am sure, will be an opportunity at that expo for young people to come along and find out how they can become engaged in it. When you have unemployment at almost 14 per cent you need a holistic approach to tackling unemployment and supporting jobs during this difficult time.

You also need a strong partnership with the business community. We had our Keep Australia Working forum and now we have tagged it the ‘Keep Cairns working’ group. We have developed a strong partnership between Advance Cairns, the Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Tropical North Queensland and the local council to work in partnership with the federal government on job initiatives. Green Jobs has been part of that plan. I have spoken already about some of the initiatives that we have with the tourism industry and the Minister for Tourism is here today in the chamber.

We have also done a lot of things in the construction area. We have heard members opposite support in principle the idea of this plan but then criticise cuts to Landcare or other measures, as we heard the member the Gippsland do earlier. The one thing he could have done to support jobs was vote for the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. In my electorate alone there are projects worth $220 million, and we are getting close to $460 million and more with the electorate of Kennedy next door. I know that members from Cairns are down in the member for Herbert’s
electorate as well doing some construction projects. We are certainly getting great benefits from the construction industry and from the economic stimulus plan that we put in place. We need to continue to make sure that those projects are rolled out quickly and efficiently. We have had 300 social housing homes announced recently in the region, and it is important that we get those houses started as quickly as possible to support the local construction industry. Advance Cairns commissioned Cummings Economics, a well-known economic analyst in the Far North, to undertake a study of unemployment and the study showed that there was a real downturn particularly in unemployment in the construction industry and that there was a major need to support jobs in that area.

Our economic stimulus of $460 million in Leichhardt and Kennedy and the work that we are doing in places like Herbert have been particularly important in supporting plumbers, electricians, carpenters and apprentices in the range of construction jobs that are out there in those areas. It is particularly important that we roll those projects out as quickly as possible. Coming into the wet season, some of those school projects will get going early in the New Year, but they are a real confidence boost for the local community, in that we have a suite of initiatives that are about protecting jobs—whether they are in the environment, tourism or the construction industry. I am looking forward to the $9 million that the minister announced recently for new marketing opportunities and new initiatives in the tourism industry. I mentioned previously some of the business community that I worked with. I will continue to work with the Cairns Airport and Stephen Gregg, the new manager there, who is doing a good job, and also Tourism Tropical North Queensland, to develop a local package for Tourism Australia so that we can look to getting some further support for marketing the region in the Far North, so we can get tourists back and so we can support jobs going forward.

I talked about the construction industry. The other area that I think is important is Apprentice Kickstart. The Rudd government has recognised that there has been a large drop-off in the number of people being able to be supported in apprenticeships because of the global downturn and the recession that has followed around the globe. We are lucky in Australia that we are weathering the storm better than others, but with unemployment approaching 14 per cent we are being hit hard in Cairns. Minister Arbib was up in Cairns last week to launch Apprentice Kickstart with Skill360, a local group training organisation. They are doing a fantastic job up there and Troy Williams and his team should be congratulated. They are looking to really get out there and attract new apprentices into the industry, with the almost $5,000 in supplements that employers can now get to employ an apprentice.

There is a lot happening and there is a lot more that we need to continue to do by working in partnership with the business community, the local business community leaders, as the Rudd government is doing. I am looking forward to Advance Cairns, the Chamber of Commerce and the local mayor visiting Canberra next week. I am arranging a number of meetings for them to come and talk to ministers about some of the challenges we are facing and some of the other things that we can do in the tropical north, the Far North, to support jobs going forward.

I would like to thank the business community, the Mayor of Cairns, Val Schier, and the community leaders that have actively engaged with me, Minister Arbib, Minister Ferguson and others throughout these difficult times. This initiative is just another example of a tool in the toolbox that I have talked about in supporting jobs. We need to
continue to support tourism and we need to continue to support construction. We are working on the environment area, particularly with young people leaving school soon. They can go to the jobs expo and they will be able to find out about the National Green Jobs Corps, but they will also be able to find out about other jobs—whether they are in the construction, tourism, mining sectors or other parts of the economy. We have a fantastic educational sector, with a university, a great TAFE and a developing marine skills training centre and an existing aviation training centre.

There is a whole lot of positive things going on about Cairns. I am actively engaged with my local business community and community leaders. I am actively engaged with the executive of the Rudd government, and I thank them for the support they are providing to me and my local electorate. I look forward to continuing to work with them and I welcome the initiative that the National Green Jobs Corps will provide. I know it will be welcomed in my community. I am looking forward to it being rolled out in Cairns and the Far North.

Mr Lindsay—Mr Speaker, following the outrageous claims of the member for Leichhardt that the Cairns economic ideas forum is looking at taking parts of Lavarack Barracks to Cairns, I seek leave to table page 6 of the Townsville Bulletin today entitled ‘‘Hands off Lavarack’’**, which clearly indicates the position of our city in relation to this outrageous claim by Cairns.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Mr Speaker, the outrageous endeavour by the member for Herbert to disrupt the orderly proceedings of the House is unacceptable, and I reject any suggestion that the document be tabled.

Leave not granted.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (10.37 am)—I am very pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. I am sure that there is not a person in this House who is opposed to any programs designed to assist young people gain skills and employment, but I am also sure that I am not alone in my disappointment that we have a government that is more interested in appearing to be tackling this most important issue than actually tackling the issue.

The bill before us will introduce a training supplement of $41.60 to participants in the government’s National Green Jobs Corps. This supplement is in addition to any income support payments that they currently receive. It is expected that the participants will gain the skills necessary to tackle a range of environmental projects within their communities. The program is aimed at young people who have been unemployed for a sustained period of time and is designed to simultaneously address two of the most pressing issues of the present day. The first is that of rising youth unemployment and the second is that of preparing for the opportunities and challenges posed by environmental issues, which require a new workforce trained with green skills.

I think this is interesting because, while this is one program, I do not see a whole lot of evidence of a really serious push to develop green jobs. The government has announced the creation of 50,000 new green jobs, but we have yet to see any substantive program details that can go anywhere near achieving 50,000 new green jobs. And it is interesting because over the last couple of years I have been doing some investigations into green jobs, and there is a great opportunity for Australia to invest in the technology, to invest in the training and to ensure that our young people do have a future in the new green technology and the green jobs that will follow.
There are lots of examples. I think that, at present, Germany employs an estimated 300,000 people in green jobs. This is a country that has made a great virtue of its move to solar power and yet it is not a country with the natural attributes that our country has. I find it incredibly disappointing that our progress is so slow—that we have driven so much new enterprise in green jobs, solar energy and renewable energies out of this country to other countries. We have some incredible people. I have visited the University of New South Wales and I note that the scientists who have worked there have developed some amazing technology in solar power. We have the brainpower; we have the young people, who need to feel included and need to be given the training, and that may be through university level education.

One of my colleagues on the other side of this parliament was talking the other day about the need to make sure that young people are streamed into the system at all levels, because they are all necessary. I have said many times in this place a brain surgeon cannot do a job without the nurse who is trained to assist, the technologists who build the plant and equipment, the designers who design it and the mechanics who understand the mechanical workings of the equipment in an operating theatre. None of this would come together if we did not have skills at varying levels that come to work in concert to produce great outcomes. In the last few days we have seen this amazing operation taking place in Victoria to separate conjoined twins. What an amazing thing that is, but, when you look around that operating theatre and you see all the different components that contribute to that success, you see that you need more than just the surgeon.

One of the things I felt very pleased about when we were in government was that the government did put a great deal of emphasis on providing traineeships and apprenticeships for young people so that there was not the sense that if for some reason you could not go to university you were not worth anything. I think we need to continue to work on dispelling that idea. Of course I am very keen to ensure that all young people can meet the very highest aspirations they have, and if that means going to university they should be given every encouragement. But no-one should be made to feel inferior if they do not go to university, because all of these skills are enormously important, not only to the nation but to the life satisfaction of every individual. We should value that.

I was recently reading a fascinating article about why California is still America’s future. It has little to do with the subject we are talking about today, but I thought what was fascinating about this article was an examination of the development of the new renewable energy technology in California and the opportunity for young people in that country, America, to participate at all levels of development. It was quite interesting to examine some of the relevant issues in that article, which was written by Michael Grunwald and appeared in Time magazine. He was interviewing Mr Dinwoodie, the chief technology officer of SunPower, a large solar development company. The article reads:

If you think solar is an eco-fantasy, you probably don’t live in California, where rooftop installations have doubled for two years in a row, to 50,000, heading to the state goal of 1 million by 2017. The San Francisco utility Pacific Gas & Electric, which recently bolted the U.S. Chamber of Commerce over climate policy, has 40% of the nation’s solar roofs in its territory. SunPower now has more than 5,000 employees. It’s building massive power plants for utilities, as well as roof panels for big-box stores, complete subdivisions and individual homes. Prices are plummeting, and competition is fierce, most of it from California firms like BrightSource, Solar City, eSolar, Nanosolar and Solyndra. The scramble is on, and California is leaps and bounds ahead of the rest of
the country,’ says Dinwoodie. ‘That’s true of all energy issues.’

There was a bit of an analysis at the end of the article—some blocks of information. For example, California is responsible for 38 per cent of solar energy patent registrations in the United States, ‘mirroring fast-growing local demand for clean energy’. Rooftop solar installations in California have doubled for two years in a row. Then there is the high-tech area:

Firms that made their mark in microchips, software and the Web and are now pouring resources into green ventures like the digitized energy grid, ultra-high-def video-conferencing that shrinks the carbon footprint of business travel and advanced code that perfectly positions solar mirrors.

Then you have green vehicles:

California leads the nation in fuel-economy standards and registered hybrid, electric and natural-gas-fueled cars. Los Angeles and San Francisco are the top US hybrid markets.

In biotech:

The state remains the player to watch in such fields as genomic medicine and photosynthetic-algae technology, which experts say could produce far more fuel than corn, soy or sugarcane can in the same space.

I have visited the algae-to-oil program at Murdoch University. It is truly amazing, but I see really little support. That program has had some funding support from government, but I really do not see enough emphasis on this. Here we are talking about a CPRS, this great global vision, and while I recognise that an ETS can send important price signals to drive the new technology, I think there is far too much emphasis on a scheme that is going to be extremely difficult to put into place on a global basis. We are not driving the new technologies and the new opportunities nearly hard enough in this country so that every Australian can participate in reducing their carbon footprint.

That brings me back to the goal of this bill. It is just one small part in what should be a very major policy thrust. The goal of this particular bill is to equip Australian youth with green skills and training for ongoing employment. This particular program is not something new or original. It was implemented by the former Prime Minister, John Howard, in 1997, if my memory serves me correctly. We had two highly successful programs operating for over a decade, achieving just these objectives. So the people of Australia were quite right, I think, to raise an eyebrow when the National Green Jobs Corps was announced as a new policy centerpiece of the first ALP party conference after 13 years in opposition. The government proudly announced the creation, as I said, of 50,000 new green jobs, but we have since found out that the figure probably will not come to 5,000 and that most of the places are not new—and many are not even jobs in the real sense. That is a great pity, because we have these other opportunities beckoning and are doing little to prepare ourselves for the kind of future that we need to be preparing for. In any event, this grand announcement at the party conference was about publicity over policy. Again, it is very disappointing. It was about taking credit where credit is not due. It is truly symbolic, I think, of the style of governance that we are seeing, and that is disappointing.

Of the 50,000 new green jobs that the government has announced, 10,000 places have been allocated for the National Green Jobs Corps. If this program sounds familiar, it will also look familiar. For more than 10 years the coalition’s Green Corps successfully equipped young Australians with green skills by engaging them in community environment programs. The National Green Jobs Corps is essentially an amalgam of the Green Corps and Work for the Dole, as participants will receive a supplement but also continue
to receive their Newstart, youth allowance or other payments, such as parenting payment. In May 2008 the government announced, in relation to the Green Corps:

The Green Corps Allowance will not continue. Job seekers participating in Green Corps projects will receive an income support payment, if eligible. Access to Green Corps projects will be widened to include job seekers of any working age.

In essence, the National Green Jobs Corps is a reversion to the Green Corps before these changes were made, with a few small tinkering, excessive grandstanding and a good dose of repackaging. It would appear that the projects that will be undertaken under the banner of the National Green Jobs Corps will be largely the same as those that have been enriching Australian communities for the last 10 years. So the key differences are that instead of being targeted at 17- to 20-year-olds it is now targeted at 17- to 24-year-olds, participants in the Green Corps received an allowance of $240 a fortnight, and participants in the National Green Jobs Corps will receive their income support and a supplement.

I support the National Green Jobs Corps because I supported the Green Corps very strongly. In the 10 years from 1997, the Green Corps participants planted more than 15 million trees, erected more than 8,000 kilometres of fencing, removed 37,000 hectares of weeds, collected 9,500 kilograms of seeds, built or maintained 5,000 kilometres of walking trails and completed more than 5,000 animal or plant surveys. The program was really a win-win. The community and the environment benefited from the tireless work of dedicated and motivated young Australians who worked hard to improve the community for the benefit and enjoyment of all. I hope some of these young participants might get to hear of the debate in this place. I would like to commend them and congratulate them for the enormous work that they have done to their communities. As I said in many graduations, one day they may be able to come back with their children and their grandchildren and say, ‘I helped to preserve this piece of natural bush,’ or ‘I built these facilities as a young person.’ I think they did a fantastic job.

But it was not just the environment that was nurtured and supported in this program. What I often saw was young people coming in very shy, very unsure of themselves, and having difficulty talking to people in the public arena. I would come back after the program had finished, at the graduation, and these same young people would be up there giving fantastic presentations, having bonded with a group of other people, learnt how to work as part of a team and learnt new skills—real skills. They also learnt about the natural environment. They learnt about the threat to remnant vegetation and how difficult it is, as development encroaches, for our animals and insects and birds to live on these remnants and to have to cross from one section to another to find habitats and feeding places. So these young people learnt about the threat to our environment and about its sensitivity.

I went to places like Gingin Brook in my electorate, the home of my ancestors. The waterwheel that my great-grandfather built to irrigate the great Cheriton Estate in Gingin still turns today. It was built around 1843 and it turned 24 hours a day to irrigate a local farm. It has been moved into the centre of town, it stands today and it is still turning. So for me to go to Gingin Brook and see the work these young people have done to clean out the weed that was choking the brook and the work to replace introduced vegetation species with indigenous plants was just a treat. I could go on and on—all over my electorate work was being done. Sometimes it was collecting seed; sometimes it was cleaning our rivers and waterways; sometimes it was building walkways for people
with a disability so they too could go into our bushland and enjoy the natural environment and have greater access to it; and sometimes it was building bird habitats and fences or weeding—as I said, there were many, many jobs. But what I also saw was a greater and deepening appreciation of the sensitivity of the environment in which we live and the great need to preserve this environment. And that is something that will last for those young people over a lifetime.

The other matter that was very noticeable was the way in which young people were encouraged to engage with the community. In communities like York, Gingin, Chittering and Northam, all over the electorate of Pearce, we have Landcare groups and environmental groups, people who volunteer their time to ensure the improvement and sustainability of our environment. These people gave their time freely and they assisted, aided and interacted with these young people in a way that gives you great hope for the future. So I also thank those many men and women who have worked for many years in the voluntary organisations throughout Pearce and have been mentors to some of these young people, inspiring them, guiding them and assisting them. We are a lucky country to have such people.

I think the National Green Jobs Corps is an important program. It is important that we continue this work. It is important that we provide maximum opportunities for our young people in this country to begin to feel part of the solution of reducing our carbon footprint and continuing to improve and look after the environment in which we live.

Mr RAGUSE (Forde) (10.57 am)—I rise today to speak on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. I would certainly like to acknowledge the previous speaker, the member for Pearce, for her understanding of the environment and the need for these sorts of programs. I should point out, though, that our Green Corps projects are quite specifically different and extended. If you consider statements by other members who have spoken this morning from the other side, their understanding of the introduction of Green Corps jobs comes from a time when climate deniers were very strong in the ranks of those opposite, as they are today. The Howard government may have had some sensitivities towards the need for greening Australia and an understanding of work on the environment, but how can those from a government of some years ago who were deniers of climate change actually understand now, while they debate against the CPRS or the ETS, that essentially things have changed. Our Green Corps jobs and our approach to Green Corps is about an understanding of climate change, so it is very much in a different context and it is an extension of what we understand the previous program to have been.

The core of this bill is relatively simple. The bill amends the Social Security Act 1991 to provide an additional $41.60 a fortnight to young people participating in the National Green Jobs Corps. The National Green Jobs Corps forms part of 50,000 new green jobs and training places announced by the Rudd government in July this year. The National Green Jobs Corps is a separate project to the current Green Corps activities provided by Job Services Australia. This new program is specifically designed for young unemployed people from 17 to 24 years of age. Participants will undertake a 26-week placement and be required to be in training and activities for 25 hours per week or 50 hours per fortnight.

Australian citizens and permanent residents who receive Newstart allowance, youth allowance or parenting payment will be eligible for the additional payment proposed in
this bill. This payment will provide practical assistance with meeting the costs of participating in the National Green Jobs Corps. The National Green Jobs Corps has four main objectives: to provide young Australians with skills in emerging climate related industries; to provide young Australians with quality work experience in the environment and heritage field; to make connections between young Australians and the broader community; and to provide personal development in the form of teamwork, leadership and job preparation skills. I particularly note the importance of the fourth objective, that is, personal development. In tackling unemployment, personal development is a critical component of breaking the cycle of poverty and unemployment.

National Green Jobs Corps projects can cover a wide variety of important environmental areas: installation of energy efficient technologies, including building insulation; bush regeneration and planting native trees; erosion control; beach and dune rehabilitation; wildlife and fish habitat protection; walking and nature track construction or restoration; biodiversity monitoring; flora, fauna and land surveys and audits; developing community information and education products; community environment consultation and surveys; and activities to care for the natural environment and cultural heritage. It is predicted that 10,000 National Green Jobs Corps places will be made available from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2011.

In his second reading speech, the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment noted ‘young people are particularly vulnerable to the current economic uncertainty’. It is noted that during the 1990s recession around 40 per cent of school leavers were not in education or employment six months after leaving school. Today, youth employment is again the hardest hit—young people accounting for over 40 per cent of the increase in unemployment over the last 12 months. This is why National Green Jobs Corps opportunities are targeted towards unemployed youth. This initiative must be viewed in conjunction with the broader learning or earning direction of the Rudd government, which requires people under the age of 20 to be in education or training to qualify for youth allowance. This initiative, therefore, targets three areas of critical importance to the Rudd government: education, unemployment and environmental sustainability. It was interesting to hear previous speakers, particularly the member for Gilmore and the member for Gippsland, who both spoke about the need for these jobs; yet the Rudd government seems not to be performing in this area! It is quite interesting because, as I talk about my electorate, there are lots and lots of examples of how we have moved forward significantly in the area of providing jobs that are very much environmentally based.

In the past, my electorate of Forde has been a beneficiary of green projects. Last year I had the privilege of announcing an exciting project on Tamborine Mountain. Coordinated by Conservation Volunteers Australia, the Tamborine Mountain Green Links project involved 10 volunteers from 17 to 20 years of age. The main project involved flora and fauna surveys at three project sites. The surveys were of local grasses and of aquatic fauna, bird and plant life. This data will assist with the future monitoring and management of projects in the local area. There was also the opportunity to participate in track construction, native seed collection, plant propagation, native plant revegetation, and community education and engagement with the Tamborine Mountain schools and community groups.

The stunning mountainous Gold Coast hinterland, the environments of Forde, is an attractive place for environmental projects.
For this reason, the Forde electorate has also received Green Jobs Corps funding for a project in the Numinbah Valley. This project, the Upper Nerang River Riparian Restoration and Giant Barred Frog Habitat Protection, is based at the Bornhoffen Police Citizens Youth Club at Natural Bridge. The project is to establish the first stages of a walking trail and a virtual herbarium at the PCYC. The herbarium will allow visitors to learn about native plants, trees, wildlife and insects. Activities involved in the project include installation of signage, mapping of significant sites, fauna and flora surveys, water quality testing, and seed collecting and propagating. Participants are also working on the Giant Barred Frog research project with Griffith University and their Endangered Frog Research Centre. The broader Numinbah Valley Frog Project is being coordinated by Jim Rebgetz from the Numinbah Valley Environmental Education Centre and by Associate Professor Jean-Marc Hero from Griffith University. These two projects have provided valuable training and skills to young people in Forde. Assuming that the proposals from Forde compare favourably with other proposals from across Australia, I anticipate the electorate of Forde to continue to be a hive of Rudd government supported environmental activity.

The members for Gippsland and Gilmore have made a number of statements in which they have asked where the green jobs are. It is clear that local advocacy and working with the community to find opportunities is very much an important part of what we as members do. As an advocate for many of the projects in my region, it is proven that the government will come to the party when it involves giving young people an opportunity to work. In an area that is very much affected by climate change, environmental based jobs are very important. As I mentioned, the member for Pearce, whom we know to have certain sensitivities towards the environment, has to some degree been cut from the herd because there are members who very much do not believe that climate change is occurring. It is very important that we all understand that those are the members who have challenged us about the green jobs. It is very interesting that they should suggest that, when they are fighting the whole concept of climate change. It is real, it does have an effect and it is the Rudd government that is working on climate change. No member should be cut from the herd. It is very much a case of them all coming together to support the legislation and ultimately these jobs that we provide.

The two projects that I have talked about have supported young people, their jobs, activities, training and learning within the seat of Forde. But there is a wider issue, a holistic issue, around what we, the Rudd government, are about. I have spoken previously in this chamber about education, training and opportunity. It is clear from the history of the Labor Party that we look towards the future in training, skills enhancement and the ability to give young people opportunities, particularly if they find themselves unemployed. Our history shows that we have set up systems and projects in the past. Our commitment to skills, training and even trade training centres, which we will roll out in this country, are all related to the overall plan to give young people opportunities. It will provide them not only with employment but also with the training and education that go with that employment.

For that purpose I will comment today on not only our environmental considerations for jobs but our trade training centres. In the last couple of weeks we had a major announcement in Forde, which I am very pleased about, as part of the $384 million commitment to trade training centres that we as a government have instituted. I would like
to recognise and congratulate a new hub that has been formed in my electorate by three high schools: the Windaroo Valley State High School, the Beenleigh State School and Loganlea State High School. They have received $3.9 million to form a hospitality training hub in the region. While I have talked about the opportunities such high schools present for young people in the community, this will go much further, establishing the seat of Forde, that area and those schools as a hospitality training hub for the region.

Lots of people in my electorate, being part of the Gold Coast hinterland, are involved in the hospitality industry on the Gold Coast. With the skills deficit that we saw prior to the economic concerns of the last 18 months, this is very much a time for skills training and skills enhancement. As we emerge from this economic turmoil, people with skills will be very important—particularly, in my region, in hospitality.

Adding to this is another project at the Trinity College, which has also gained a trade training centre and $1.5 million which will focus on the automotive, manufacturing and construction industries. It is great news not only for my community, for the seat of Forde and for my advocacy, but also for our region.

The high schools came together quite collaboratively to make this particular project happen. About 18 months ago, I spoke to the schools I just mentioned and talked to them about the opportunities that these skills centres could present, saying that if they could form a hub it was most likely a way that we could present ourselves as a priority region for trade training centres. I want to acknowledge the people who were part of that. At Windaroo Valley State High School, Dennis Irvine, the principal at the time, was very receptive to the idea, and his replacement, the new principal, Kay Louwrens, has also carried on that legacy. At the Beenleigh State School, Ms Desley Hodge, who was the acting principal during that time and has retained her role as a deputy principal, and now Mr Matthew O’Hanlon, who has come on board as the principal, again are driving that process forward. At Loganlea State High School, Allison Crane as part of that particular consortium put the project together, talked at length to the agencies involved and proved the case overwhelmingly that such a hub could be established within the region.

As I said before, our Green Jobs Corps is one part of the complexity of maintaining employment and providing training, and also giving younger people opportunities.

Those three schools are part of the ENABLE Coalition, which is a group of 11 state high schools who have combined their weight. They pull together, collaborate and cooperate to make sure we provide good training for our region. I mentioned cutting people from the herd earlier; it is great to see that, when everyone comes together and works together, we can certainly get these outcomes for our region. The plan is to provide more opportunities through the National Green Jobs Corps program, the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program, working with high schools and working with vocational education institutions.

As you may be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I have said it many times in this chamber, about 10 years of my career was as a teacher and lecturer and then as a TAFE director, so I very much value the direction we as a government are taking. As the member for Pearce mentioned, not everyone necessarily has to aspire to a university education. That is quite true. There are programs for people at all levels in terms of their aspirations, and there has always been great demand for people who have good vocational
skills. So if we as a country are going to move forward, if we are going to engender an understanding of ongoing training and development, it is very important that we have those skills at the vocational level.

I should mention that about 15 years ago I was instrumental in developing a process where we had reverse articulation from universities back into the TAFE system. As we all know, for many years in the education system particular colleges and schools acted as silos to a large degree, and articulation did not exist. It was clear that, while we have always developed great learning institutions in this country—and that is why a lot of international students prefer to study in this country—the reality is that for our own people there needs to be greater ability to move across certain areas of study, to take on an academic qualification and to enhance that with vocational skills. It is very much related to the whole Green Corps Jobs program, which is about giving people skills on the ground. So, while academically you may have an understanding and have had the training, the ability to empirically put those skills into practice is very important.

For those reasons, I applaud the Rudd government for our attempt to provide all opportunities. At a time when climate change is very much at the centre of the discussion taking place in this parliament—and, as we speak, in the other place—the important thing is to recognise that the science of climate change is something that we must understand and respect, and certainly do something about. The opposition quite often attack us as a government, asking for proof of climate change and where the jobs are. Here is a good example of the future opportunities that will emerge from our understanding of climate change and how we as a country tackle it.

The overall plan is of course to grow our educational base, to grow our institutions. That is good not only for Australian citizens and for their access to all forms of education but also for the emerging international market. Back when I was working in that area, international student access to programs in Australia was only in its very early stages, but the quality of the product we had developed—and have continued to develop—was clear. There are currently some issues about organisations and institutions that provide certain levels of training to international students, and we need to make sure that the quality is there and that people overseas who see Australia as a destination for study and training come here with the knowledge that they will get the very best education. Education and training of international students is worth over $15 billion to this country right now.

There is an acknowledgement across this House that education is a very important part of our society. Our communities understand, as does every family, the value of good education and access to that education. While it is traditional education that is accessed through our primary and high schools, including those in my electorate, the reality is that people should have choice about taking on certain levels of training, vocational skills outcomes, academic training and how we put all that together.

When we look at the program and our extension to the National Green Jobs Corps, we can see that this is a different program. While it is under the auspices of what has been around for a long time—and members from the other side have spoken about the history of all that—the reality is that the Rudd government’s extension is into new areas and will provide 50,000 new jobs in new or emerging industries. We do that on the back of climate change and on the back of an understanding that we as a country
need not only to put in place a response to climate change—certainly from a political and legal perspective—but also to then prepare ourselves through skills enhancement. At a very basic level the National Green Jobs Corps continues what was started as a way of dealing with and managing the environmental concerns of the last 20 years. Things are changing. The jobs that we are now seeing and the jobs that we are encouraging through this particular program are very much about the future and about tackling climate change.

In conclusion, the program and the dollars that we are providing to young people will give them a further opportunity to participate. It will provide practical assistance and financial reward for the people who are taking the opportunity to provide themselves with some of the necessities of transport, clothing and other costs associated with involving themselves in a program. It is also a recognition that this government is very serious about jobs. We are serious about young people, we are serious about our community, and we are very serious about climate change. While I urge, and have continued to urge, the opposition to update their response to climate change, they can now have the opportunity, certainly in the Senate, to come on board with us and not cut one another from the herd but work together as one group of people who move forward as a nation and provide opportunities for all of us and have a significant effect on climate change for this country. For those reasons I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MARKUS (Greenway) (11.17 am)—I rise today to speak about a coalition program initiative, one of many but one which is very important to the future of our nation. The coalition initiative, like so many other coalition initiatives, is about jobs, about opportunity, about upskilling our young people and giving them hope for a better life. The program is so worth while that the Labor Party has introduced legislation to bring back the program almost identical to the way it was first framed back in 1997 when the coalition first introduced it, a program that between 1997 and 2007 enabled 16,000 young people to gain valuable experience across the nation. During this time around 80 per cent of those Green Corps participants completed the program they started, a program that, again, between 1997 and 2007 resulted in 56 per cent of participants within three months pursuing employment, education or training. The program I am referring to is the National Green Corps program, a program built on earlier work established in 1992 under the LEAP program, but with significant differences. Now the program is known by its new name, the National Green Jobs Corps.

Since the change of government in 2007 Labor have criticised and denigrated everything the coalition has ever done. At the same time they are happy to be the beneficiaries of the coalition’s strong economic management that saw a record $22 billion surplus and no government debt. No matter how they dress it up, it was the coalition’s economic legacy that pulled Australia through the past 18 months, not the cash splash or the reckless spending. I raise that point to illustrate the duplicitous nature of Labor. They talk of the coalition policy, attack coalition policy, yet behind the scenes they are quietly rebranding programs established by the coalition and announcing those programs as if they are something new. In a funny sort of way it seems that this is a bit of a compliment that Labor is paying the coalition.

One coalition program that I was particularly proud of was the National Green Corps program. Initiated in 1997, the program ran successfully for over 10 years until the Labor government decided to terminate it on 30 June 2008. Within a month they brought it back, extended the age eligibility, specified
10,000 places and introduced a temporary supplementary payment of $41.60. The rest was almost a direct lift from the coalition program.

In my local paper, the *Hawkesbury Gazette*, at the time that there was an announcement that Green Corps was to be stopped, there were a number of comments made by those that had benefited from the program, and I would like to talk just briefly about a program that was carried out at Kurrajong. Throughout their six-month journey the team planted a bush tucker garden and built a boardwalk at the EarthCare Centre on the University of Western Sydney’s Hawkesbury campus, held a tree planting festival, worked at the Community Nursery, and removed numerous weeds such as lantana from properties in the Kurrajong area. More than 500 trees were planted at the EarthCare Centre and they recycled 262 pallets to make the boardwalk. That is pretty incredible.

Some of the young people spoke about their experience. Monique Johnston said:

> When I got this job I was so excited, mainly because it was a job and all I was worried about was making money and getting my mum off my back. Then I started learning about the environment and as each week passed we were starting to bond really well.

This team is just amazing and they have always been there for me through the good and the bad.

I don’t know where I will be in five years but I know I can look back and remember what a great experience Green Corps was.

This was a girl whose self-esteem, confidence, perception and view of the future were turned around by this program.

The program was designed to give a hand-up to young unemployed people, and will provide 10,000 environmental work experience and training places for young Australians aged 17 to 24. The program begins on 1 January 2010 and will finish on 31 December 2011. I understand the government draws a distinction between the National Green Jobs Corps program and the Green Corps program under Jobs Services Australia. Essentially they are the same, but the National Green Jobs Corps targets a specific age group.

There is also an emphasis in the National Green Jobs Corps program on emerging green and climate change related industries. With the closure by the Labor government of the popular solar installation rebate program and the downgrading of the ceiling insulation program, the promise of work experience in those industries—particularly in states such as New South Wales—raises the question of whether those jobs will be fulfilled.

Under the National Green Jobs Corps program, 30 per cent of job placements will be in non metropolitan areas. That means 70 per cent of placements in jobs will be in metropolitan areas. The sort of projects they will participate in include: natural environment, water, conservation, community, cultural and environmental heritage, and of course, something that is very important, climate change. In addition, it is expected that all projects will, as a rule, take place on public land. The question has to be asked: how much public land is available given that 70 per cent of the projects are in metropolitan areas? Although there are some exceptions and work can be done on private land—for example, weed eradication and restoration of significant green heritage—I ask the minister to be a little bit more specific about the climate change jobs. Where are they, and what are they?

In regard to the private land opportunities, the information sheet on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website states that ‘projects may be allowable on private land where there is a
defined community benefit, which exceeds the private benefit accrued to the landowner’. But who decides this level of benefit? Where is the transparency in the system to ensure that there is no exploitation? My concern and my commitment is to these young men and women who will go to the National Green Jobs Corps program expecting jobs at the end and it all peters out. I want this program to work, as many in this House do. I want to see young unemployed people in Australia have a chance to grow their skills and to grow their confidence and their capacity, but I do not want their expectations raised and then dashed.

The coalition did deliver, and we had a strong economic position that meant funding was available for ongoing programs such as the Green Corps. Our young people are our future. We need not only to train them and support them but also to provide opportunities for them. We need to ensure that there are jobs out there so that they can share in the wealth of this nation, so that they can plan for their future confidently. In closing, I would just like to read a statement, again from a Hawkesbury Gazette article on Wednesday 22 April. The national Greening Australia chief executive officer, David Williams, is quoted as saying:

While the Green Corps work experience program would still exist as part of the government’s new employment services program, it would be losing the elements of certified training, the teamwork, and real job experience of a long term of six months.

So this question has to be raised—and I hope it can be answered in a way that indicates our young people will be provided with jobs and that they will have employment opportunities created for them. I had the privilege of meeting a group of Green Corps participants at a project within my electorate. It was at a place called Second Ponds Creek which, historically, had a large planting of Cumberland Plain woodland. Unfortunately, over the years as land was cleared for pastoral and other uses, a number of the trees and also the significant flora and fauna of the Cumberland Plain woodland were degenerated. These young people came together and Greg Hunt and I visited them on an occasion when they celebrated their success. That whole corridor along the creek is now replanted and regenerated with Cumberland Plain woodland. The native birds, flora and fauna, are now back and growing well. I can tell you that eight of those 12 participants are now in paid employment. In fact, one of them works not far from my office in Windsor. It is wonderful to see these outcomes for our young people and my hope for this program is that this is what we will see for the 10,000 participants.

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (11.27 am)—I rise in the House today to speak in support of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. This bill will amend the Social Security Act 1991 to provide a training supplement of $41.60 per fortnight to be paid to participants in the federal government’s National Green Jobs Corps training program. Participants eligible for this new supplement will be those young people aged 17 to 24 years who are receiving Newstart allowance, youth allowance (other), or the parenting payment. Participants beginning the program will need to start training between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. The supplement will be paid in addition to the allowances already being received by the participants. The supplementary payments will help participants to meet certain costs involved in undertaking Green Jobs Corps placements, such as travel. The regular additional financial support provided by the supplement will also act as an incentive for young people to join the program.

The National Green Jobs Corps supplement is targeted at low-skilled young people...
including those who have been unemployed for more than 12 months. This program is specifically targeted at those young people who have not completed year 12 schooling. The National Green Jobs Corps will help job participants in a variety of ways. It will develop green skills through 26 weeks, or 130 hours, of accredited training and work experience skills that are needed for the labour market of the future. They will receive a Certificate I or a Certificate II qualification in horticulture, soil conservation and land management. They will work on vital local projects that have significant environmental benefits to communities around Australia.

Young people, especially those who lack skills or qualifications, are among the most vulnerable sectors of the labour market. This is especially the case in periods of global economic downturn, such as Australia has experienced in recent times. I am particularly pleased to be able to speak in support of the National Green Jobs Corps supplement bill. This is because my electorate of Robertson, on the Central Coast of New South Wales, has been one of the regions hardest hit by recent increases in levels of youth unemployment. According to ABS labour force figures, unemployment for the Central Coast region in March 2009 stood at 5.7 per cent. This percentage compares relatively well with the national figure of 6.1 per cent, and even more favourably with the New South Wales figure of seven per cent for March 2009. However, there has been a noticeable spike in youth unemployment across the Central Coast over the past year, which is in sharp contrast. Between October 2008 and July 2009, the proportion of Central Coast youth registered as unemployed jumped from 25.3 per cent—already a tragedy—to 42 per cent. These figures point to the vulnerable position that young people on the Central Coast occupy within the labour market at times of rising unemployment.

Youth unemployment has been a priority of mine since I was elected to represent the people of Robertson. I have taken a keen interest in youth training and skills development on the Central Coast, including the work done in programs such as Hand Brake Turn and Green Corps. These programs provide structured work experience and accredited training for these young people who are struggling to remain engaged with education and training. I have attended several Green Corps graduation ceremonies and I can personally vouch for the significant benefits gained by the participants.

The former Green Corps program was delivered in my electorate by Tony Mylan and Naomi Taifalos and staff from ET Australia located in Gosford. They formed partnerships with the community environment network, local bush care and dune care groups and even the Australian Reptile Park at Somersby, which has been made so famous in recent months with its Tasmanian devil program. Programs such as these provide accredited training that is recognised nationwide and prepare the participants with green skills that are needed for the labour market in the future. But these training places provide much more than just that. The participants I speak to, and there are many of them, tell me of the overwhelming positive outcomes they have achieved through the program. Not only have they met friends, they have gained a new level of self-esteem and a new passion for shared community goals.

Many of the young people who were involved in Green Corps were those who were directionless, who felt they did not participate well at school, who did not feel they were appreciated, who often had never received any award or any achievement in much of their lives. And suddenly, in joining Green Corps and finalising that program, they achieved something that not only they felt pride in, but also their parents, their
families and their communities recognised and held in great esteem. They felt they had worked side by side with their colleagues towards a worthy outcome, improving their local environment and strengthening the social and physical fabric of their communities. They had worked very hard over a long 26-week period and really felt proud of their achievements and of themselves. Many of them had been disengaged from education and training and had not worked for long periods of time. The terrible tragedy is that many young people, particularly in that under 21 age group, if they do not enter the workforce and develop skills in those early years, may never or never properly secure employment in the future. This is an extremely important program.

Some of them had also lost meaningful engagement with their families, former schoolmates and friends, because if you are out of work or out of education how do you make contact with them? Some of them had significant personal challenges in relation to other issues. These are all the reasons why I support the National Green Jobs Corps and the supplementary financial support it provides to young people who are at risk of disengagement. It is a formula for skills development and personal growth that I have seen firsthand, and I know that it works. The Green Jobs Corps will help the youth of the Central Coast re-engage with mainstream society and prepare them for further employment in the future. What more admirable outcome can we hope to achieve for our young people? I commend the government for its commitment to them.

This commitment has been clearly demonstrated by the practical measures that the Rudd Labor government has taken to support employment across Australia through the economic stimulus package. Supporting and creating jobs has been one of the national imperatives that has underpinned the whole thrust of the economic stimulus package. This package has already had a positive impact on my electorate. At my latest count, approximately $110 million from the economic stimulus package has been invested directly in the economy of Robertson. This includes more than $81 million allocated under the Building the Education Revolution. The Primary Schools of the 21st Century initiative, a major component of the BER, is transforming all of the 33 primary schools in Robertson, equipping them with new classrooms, multipurpose halls, outdoor learning areas and libraries. The P21 program is directly boosting jobs for tradespeople, contractors and small business people right across the Central Coast.

More than $5 million has been granted to Gosford City Council to begin a massive upgrade of parks, playgrounds and community buildings under the community infrastructure program. Seventy-three social housing units have been built at a cost of $19.6 million, and another 476 have been refurbished as a result of the economic stimulus package. All of this means more jobs for our people on the Central Coast, and particularly more jobs for our young people and of course for the many apprentices who are employed on these sites.

The Jobs Fund is targeted squarely with youth employment in mind. In round 1 of the Jobs Fund, more than $1.8 million has been invested so that the local training organisation, Youth Connections, can establish a green business incubator at Mount Penang Parklands at Kariong, again in my electorate, linked to the local horticulture industry—a new and developing green industry that I very strongly support. This project alone will create or retain 22 jobs, 49 traineeships and 12 work experience places for the young people of the Central Coast.
The Central Coast has been designated a priority employment area and a local employment coordinator has been appointed to oversee the plans. Recently I hosted a Keep Australia Working forum in my electorate, which was attended by scores of local businesses, jobs service providers, government agencies, community groups and registered training organisations. One of the major focuses of that forum was the alarming level of youth unemployment in the region. With 42 per cent of the coast’s youth looking for employment, it is vital that the government’s focus on jobs for young people is maintained and strengthened. Jack Ritchie, the new LEC—local employment coordinator—is hard at work now setting up a committee that will forge a regional employment strategy for the Central Coast. To date, 21 Keep Australia Working forums have been held around Australia. My area is just one of the areas where the government is putting in major resources and work.

Australia has weathered the global economic crisis better than most comparable countries but the challenges facing us over unemployment are still of great concern, particularly amongst our young people. Just to keep the unemployment rate static Australia must create approximately 18,000 jobs every month. It is significant that young people without skills or qualifications are the ones who suffer most in a strained labour market. This is what we are experiencing at the moment and we must safeguard our young people and preserve them as part of the workforce for them and for us in the future.

Nearly two-thirds of job seekers under 21 years currently on the Jobs Australia caseload have not completed a year 12 or equivalent qualification. Of the 169,000 Australians who have lost their jobs in the last 12 months, 35 per cent are young people under the age of 25. Youth unemployment accounts for more than 40 per cent of the increase in unemployment over the last 12 months. Those without year 12 qualifications were massively overrepresented among this group. Lack of qualifications among youth is a significant marker of vulnerability in the labour market. In the recession of the early 1990s, approximately 40 per cent of early schools leavers were not in education or employment six months after leaving school. This alarming rate compared with just 12 per cent among those who had completed high school.

The Rudd Labor government has taken positive action to address the challenges facing our vulnerable youth. Under the ‘earn or learn’ initiative, people under 21 without year 12 qualifications must be involved in education or training to qualify for youth allowance. The National Green Jobs Corps is a means to assist these young people to meet these qualifying requirements. Up to 10,000 of the most vulnerable young people aged between 17 and 24 years will participate in the National Green Jobs Corps over the next two years.

This commitment is part of the Rudd Labor government’s Green Skills program, which will see 50,000 green jobs and training opportunities made available. In addition to the 10,000 places provided under the National Green Jobs Corps program, another 30,000 apprentices will graduate by 2011 with green skills as part of their qualifications. Another 4,000 training opportunities will be made available for home insulation installers. And 6,000 local green jobs will allow unemployed Australians to contribute to environmental sustainability in priority employment areas.

The National Green Jobs Corps will provide work experience and training in bush regeneration, erosion control, beach and dune rehabilitation and habitat protection. Of equal importance is the program’s focus on
participants developing community information and education projects. The interactions these young people forge within the wider community are vital to their re-engagement with society and a fuller participation in the social and economic life of their communities. They are also vital to rebuilding self-esteem. The National Green Jobs Corps is another step towards providing this country with real solutions that address our high levels of youth unemployment and is a direct and positive step in that direction.

Job service providers, including Jobs Australia, were consulted at certain stages in the framing of the bill for these new arrangements. As a result the government made a number of changes to the proposal: 17-year-olds were included in the scheme; providers were allowed to promote the National Green Jobs Corps to potential participants; provision was made so that program providers can receive a replacement fee when they replace participants who have exited the program; it was recognised that a participant’s move to a job or to further education after 13 weeks would be treated as completion; and, finally, the arrangements allowed smaller regional organisations to deliver the Green Jobs Corps program as a subcontractor. These changes were all very well received.

Job service providers will begin offering the program from 1 January 2010. It is critical that this bill is passed quickly so that the supplement can be provided to participants from the scheduled beginning of the scheme. The National Green Jobs Corps supplement has been welcomed by many organisations. In July, ACTU President Sharan Burrow said the plan would support young Australians hit hard by the economic slowdown. Heather Ridout of the Australian Industry Group noted that the program would fill gaps in the nation’s green skills capacity. In fact, here I must comment that her twin sister, much to my disturbance when I first met her, is actually the principal of one of our local schools. When I first visited the school and met her I was a bit startled until she explained that she was actually Heather’s identical twin sister. The Australian Conservation Foundation similarly applauded the focus on green jobs.

I am a great supporter of this program and of this bill. Giving additional financial support to 10,000 young Australians while they strengthen their skills base is good news for the employability of the participants and good news for the Australian economy. The training supplement will ease the burden on some our most vulnerable young people and give more Australians the skills they need to re-engage with meaningful employment. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (11.44 am)—It is a pleasure to talk on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. The thing that I really enjoy when listening to newer members of parliament is the complete lack of history. The member for Robertson, a member for whom I have some fondness, I must confess, as we share a parliamentary committee—and it has probably been a career-limiting move for both of us for me to mention that—was speaking about the Green Jobs Corps as if nothing has ever happened before, as if you can wipe off the whole history of its evolution as if it were never there, as if it is all brand-new, shiny and spunky and as if it is a great insight from the Rudd Labor government. What she has left out is that this announcement, which was the set centrepiece of the Labor national conference, has been ridiculed for its emptiness and has been criticised for its simple rebadging of activity that the former government undertook, much of which Labor in opposition opposed. Remember Youth Allowance and how trying to get young people to either learn or work was going to bring down the social fabric in so many societies? And re-
member how Work for the Dole was an evil, horrendous thing? Yet here we have it just by another name. And there is the whole idea of the Green Corps program, which Labor wound up on 30 June and then started again under another brand, dropping in the word ‘Jobs’ when there are not actually that many jobs as part of it. This is just fantastic stuff!

I feel for those people who are listening. They must think: ‘Gee, all these great insights! Isn’t it terrific to see Prime Minister Rudd doing so much—and he has learnt so much over the last couple of years. All the things he hated he now embraces quite wholesomely.’ And here we have them rebadged and brought forward as some kind of Labor government initiative. Alas, that is not the case. What we are seeing today is a bill to reintroduce programs that were allowed to wither on the vine, programs that the Howard government implemented that had wide community support but ran against the grain of many in the ALP. Those programs, such as Work for the Dole, were allowed to fall and atrophy. They were being defunded to death then they come back as something different, with a different name and a different tag.

Here we have a proposition to provide a temporary supplementary payment for participants in the National Green Jobs Corps program, people who are on youth allowance, Newstart allowance or parenting payment. This is an idea that looks remarkably similar to the previous Green Corps program, where there was a supplement available for people—actually more than the supplement that is being made available now—to do much the same thing. That program was not allowed to continue but it has come back, as most good ideas do—in this case, in the true traditions of the Rudd Labor government, just with a slightly different tag on it. Also, it does not encourage young people or people who may not be on one of those benefits to get involved. The beauty of Green Corps—the legitimate, authentic, first version of Green Corps—was that people did not have to be on a payment to participate. So if you were in a gap year between your secondary studies and university or trying to work out whether a career pathway in land management or natural systems management was for you you could actually participate. You did not have to be receiving a payment.

In fact, this payment is claimed to be great when it is less than what was previously available and is in a program that is narrower in its reach than the one that was allowed to fade, and it is being presented in this parliament and being spruiked amongst Labor members as some brand-new idea. This is worrying but it goes to the pattern we have seen so many times before. Here, the limits are on age, on eligibility for a payment and also on the activity that can be carried out. There is a two-year program horizon and then it will cease. So, after allowing Green Corps mark 1, the authentic program, we now have Green Corps light, called National Green Jobs Corps, which does not last as long, does not involve as many people and does not provide the same incentive to participate—

Mr Baldwin—They can’t even imitate it properly!

Mr BILLSON—That is right. It is a poor imitation actually. It is a discount imitation being dressed up as if it is something brand-new, and we know it is not brand-new. It is a poor imitation of a Howard government program. That is not to say there would not be some benefits from it, but I am keen to make sure that those listening and those genuinely interested in it know what it is we are talking about. This program does provide some training for a nationally recognised qualification, a certificate I or a certificate II in horticulture or conservation and land management. This is a good thing. This is a skills
foundation from which we hope those participating may go forward.

One of the things I used to say about Work for the Dole and Green Corps, and program elements within them, was that it was great for people to get involved, even if they did not like it, even if they found that it was not for them. If a career in horticulture, conservation or land management was something a participant thought may have been for them and they found it not to be, that is a worthwhile insight to gain to help them make better choices and better selections around career pathways. If it is found that it hits their buttons that is fantastic. A new sense of purpose and a career trajectory can be kicked off from this program and its predecessors with a nationally recognised qualification. What is worrying though is that one of the great purposes of Green Corps mark 1, rather than the watered-down poor imitation, was that we thought that if someone actually found a job and pursued their career in paid employment that was a good thing and that should be encouraged. All of the program providers I have met down in the greater Frankston-Mornington Peninsula area always have the participants' best interests at heart but, sadly, under this program design in doing so they could be financially disadvantaged. If a person leaves the program the progress payments that may be ahead are not paid, and there is no scope to replace that person in the program. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you and I were partners running one of these programs and we found we were able to steer one of our participants into a job opportunity perhaps related to horticulture, land conservation or land management and the great outcome was we could actually get someone into a job, as program providers we would be financially disadvantaged. I do not think that is the kind of incentive we should be providing or signal we should be sending for program providers.

Mr Baldwin—Should get a bonus.

Mr BILLSON—I think we should be encouraging them to support that transition to employment. As my friend and colleague the member for Paterson said, you would think that would earn a bonus rather than a financial penalty. So that is another flaw in the program design. It is a diluted, poor equivalent of a very successful Howard government program, with less scope to participate, less generous financial incentives for those who are able to participate and a design flaw whereby all that we hope for—that is, a jobs outcome—actually is a penalty for program providers if a participant finds a job. Those are three fundamental flaws in a program that tries. It heads in the right direction but misses on a couple of important fronts.

That 30 June announcement saw a touch footy colleague of mine, Senator Arbib, left speechless. I am fond of Senator Arbib. He is not often speechless, but he was when he was interviewed about this big announcement at the Labor national congress. That was where the Prime Minister announced the spending of $94 million over three years to create 50,000 new green jobs and training places. What has subsequently been revealed is that 30,000 of those 50,000 represent additional learning and training places for apprentices in order to add green related skills to their traditional skill set. So they are not new jobs or training places but additional training for apprentices learning a vocational skill base in another stream. That would include, for instance, plumbers understanding water efficiency and water efficiency appliances, something I am very keen on, having launched, in partnership with the plumbers organisation, the national Green Plumbers program. So, if your hot water service blows and you are really keen to get it replaced, there is someone there and then to point you to more energy efficient hot water systems or even solar systems. That kind of value-
added, sustainable skill set in addition to an existing vocational qualification is a positive thing, but the 30,000 out of 50,000 supposedly new jobs and training places are neither; they are supplementary skill development for existing apprentices.

There are 10,000 places in the National Green Jobs Corps. Having given an account of the program itself, I note it certainly has not peaked early in its performance. I note my friend and colleague the member for Boothby's contribution that, as of 12 August 2009, there were 36 participants in the program. That is not a screaming start after the 1 July start-up. The only thing that makes that look better is the effort of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett, with the Green Loans Program. In mid-August he finally came back to me after I had asked how many people had actually taken up a green loan. It was supposed to start on 1 July 2008 and then it was supposed to start on 1 July 2009. If I recall correctly, in mid-August the number who had received green loans was—have a guess.

Mr Baldwin—How many? Go on—tell me.

Mr BILLSON—Zero—not one. Not one green loan was provided in a program that was supposed to have started on 1 July 2008. So, at that level, I suppose the minister could say he is really firing on all cylinders, having 36 participants taking up this opportunity from 1 July through to 12 August.

The other thing is the 6,000 local jobs focused on environmental sustainability. Again, we need to look at what this is actually about. The package targets bush regeneration, erosion control, community information and education projects, beach and dune rehabilitation, and habitat protection. All of that activity, previously addressed under the Howard government’s Green Corps and Work for the Dole programs, is being hung out as if it is something new. Sadly, my area is suffering significantly from the mismanagement of the economy by the Rudd government. We have seen our area designated as high-risk. There is activity surrounding local employment coordinators and the like. That is at least recognition that things are tough.

In South-East Melbourne, in September 2009, the unemployment rate was 9.3 per cent. One of the key reasons why I entered public life was youth unemployment, having seen young people and the despair they faced about limited prospects for the future. We were able to turn that around over the years of the Howard government, but it is all trending up again. In September 2009, 14.2 per cent was the unemployment rate for younger people in our area. These are worrying trends. Our area has been designated as an area of employment vulnerability. I often talk to people about that and how their jobs are going. They recognise the importance of economic growth and that if there are resources around they should be deployed on productive infrastructure. There is a regional and local government community infrastructure program happening now.

I take these few moments to urge local communities, particularly local councils, to focus on activating projects that are productive and will generate economic and employment vitality in our area. I think of the Frankston Safe Boat Harbour project, which I have been closely involved with—carefully analysing successive projects over the last 20 years to make sure that the very important and valued beach area at Frankston is not damaged by this project. I believe the hydrodynamic analysis as to the site at the base of Olivers Hill proves that we can have such a facility and not damage the beach. Isn’t that a perfect project? Why wouldn’t the government consider investing in the sea wall—a piece of public infrastructure that would
enable private investment and activity to support community use, such as the simple retrieval and recovery of boats.

In a storm event in Port Phillip Bay, if you are stuck at Brighton—I think that is where you would have to go up to—or down at Mount Martha, there is no safe place to go. This safe boat harbour would offer that facility. Its boat storage, maintenance and repair activities would activate economic and employment opportunities. Its onshore retail and hospitality activity would also complement the local economy and highlight that Frankston is the city by the bay with so many great things going for it. I would have thought that taxpayer funding going into the public asset of the sea wall would achieve multiple objectives that support public use, more regular boat recovery and coastguard operations. We have a range of lifesaving club activities and the like that could use that facility. Even visiting vessels could moor there. People could enjoy that wonderful coastal atmosphere. That is the kind of project where taxpayer funding would make a durable economic and employment difference. That is the kind of project that I would urge people to consider. In the lead-up to the last election, I made the commitment that a re-elected Howard government would invest in that sea wall and would be a catalyst for that project. I would urge the government to turn its mind to projects like that which make a durable difference in the local area. These announcements, most of which I have explained and provided evidence to confirm, are rebadging exercises and not of the nature they have been described. They are about top-ups on training and work placement opportunities. They can be important, but let us not overlook what is going on here.

In the minute or two that is left to me I would like to touch on another issue, and that relates to this concept of green jobs. It worries me a bit. I do not know anybody who wakes up in the morning not wanting to make their contribution to the sustainability of our economy and natural systems. But to go around characterising jobs as ‘some are green and some are not’ I think is not that helpful. It reminds me of the seventies when safety officers were very popular. If you wanted to prove your workplace was safety conscious you employed a safety officer. All of us have seen examples where that kind of token interest in safety was not what was required. There was a need to inculcate safety right across the workplace and its activities. In fact, everybody’s business was safety business.

That was in the seventies and we have learned that but I fear we are going down a similar path now with green jobs, and somehow we will artificially be saying ‘That is a green job and that is not’ when we really need to inculcate sustainability principles in all that we do. We could argue that we in here are offering green jobs because we are trying to improve the sustainability of our economy and work out how we can put it on a cleaner growth trajectory for the future. Would that make our jobs green? I am not quite sure. It is a branding exercise that is not necessarily helpful. Moreover, it is not recognised that everybody can make a contribution in terms of green jobs.

The thing I am encouraged by is that at least the additional training elements, dressed up as green job places in this package, are actually putting in some sustainability skills development in the traditional training streams and qualifications. That is good. That is the kind of thing I am talking about, where sustainability is everybody’s business. I do not think going around saying one job is a green job and another is not is particularly helpful.

In closing, the thing that I hope comes out of this is some help for community organisa-
tions, like Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises. They are struggling at the moment because of the enormous cuts to funding in the Work for the Dole program and the new supervision regimes that require a permanent supervisor for a certain number of program participants. These changes have seen work placements become the norm for Work for the Dole, because separate activity—like the very activity that this bill argues it supports—cannot be carried out. So while land management revegetation, dune rehabilitation and erosion control can be pursued through this funding package—which is limited and not as generous as the scheme previously in place and runs out after two years—other government programs that could achieve that very same goal within a broader program framework, such as Work for the Dole, are having funding cuts. Programs such as this are now no longer viable.

I have been liaising closely with Russell Ardley of Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises. I said to him, ‘You might find this ironic but the very thing you are doing now maybe relevant to a new program that is kind of like the old one you used to help with, but not quite, and it is not able to have the same participants as the old one, but there you go’. Let us see if we can get some support through this funding package—which is limited and not as generous as the scheme previously in place and runs out after two years. Other government programs that could achieve that very same goal within a broader program framework, such as Work for the Dole, are having funding cuts. Programs such as this are now no longer viable.

They now need to turn their minds to this funding stream, as limited and as constrained as it is, to see if they can keep doing good work for years. What has let them down are the Rudd government’s cuts to funding for Work for the Dole and the way that has undermined their viability. Good work that has delivered benefits for the natural environment, coastal areas, riparian habitats and land management areas—public land, overwhelmingly, such as the Briars—that have faced challenges. Let us hope that good programs can now be supported through this belated acknowledgement of this valuable work. I will be doing all I can to support Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises and other organisations trying to get some of this action. (Time expired)

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (12.04 pm)—I rise to support the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. I assume the member for Dunkley was doing the same. I am not sure we can claim we have green jobs as members of parliament if we have to consume the whole 20 minutes of our available time with hot air. Occasionally, it would be wise to know that a good speech is one that is given to the meaning of the legislation and not to the time available, but I do commend him on speaking passionately about his local organisation in consuming the 20 minutes available to him. But, occasionally, less is better than more.

It is fascinating to remember that democracy occasionally allows a change of government so that we can introduce new things. We can look at things from new perspectives, and that is not such a bad thing. Changing programs, adapting programs—adapting to the times and necessities that we face and see—is actually a good thing. That is why we have a robust democracy in this country. We do change governments, and new policies and new initiatives come along.

The government is introducing this bill in recognition of the challenges Australia still faces from the global recession. We are introducing this bill in recognition of the challenges Australia faces from climate change and the transition to a green economy. I think...
we need to recognise the notion of a green economy. I do not think that is a bad thing. One of the things we are very fortunate about in Australia is that we do not actually need to convince the populace about the need for change. I think the populace is ahead of the parliament in where we need to go on this issue.

This is a bill that reflects the lessons learned from previous economic downturns, to prepare the Australian economy and our workforce for the challenges that lie ahead, most notably the need to ensure that young people acquire the skills and qualifications necessary to create a green skills base for the future. Coming out of previous recessions and downturns, the thing we did not have in place was a skilled-up economy to carry on with the boom. Hopefully we have learned the lessons from the past and with the slow rise in the economy—someone recently described it as a ‘wok rise’; I am not sure what that reference to a ‘wok’ recovery in the economy meant—we will have the skill base in place to accentuate that rise into the future.

Australia is the only major advanced economy that did not go into recession. We have the lowest debt and deficit and the second lowest unemployment rate and we have maintained our AAA credit rating, something that many economies throughout our region and the world look at with envy. These figures indicate the government’s stimulus policy, which was opposed by the coalition, has been effective in cushioning Australia from the worst effects of the global recession. Our stimulus strategy has invested heavily in important infrastructure that has helped to support thousands of jobs in the economy. Having been the federal member for Chisholm for 11 years, it is a delight to actually announce that, for once, some projects are being funded in my electorate. These are all very worthwhile infrastructure projects that will go towards helping people within my electorate.

Despite this, the fact remains that close to 170,000 Australians have lost their jobs in the past 12 months. We cannot underestimate the impact that this has had on those individuals, their families and their communities. Therefore, a key component of our policy response has also been a training and employment strategy, which has been designed to support those who have lost their jobs and young people who have been unable to enter the workforce. The recessions of the 1980s and 1990s taught us that it is young people without skills and qualifications who suffer most during economic downturns. Indeed, youth unemployment rose much quicker than the general rate of unemployment during these recessions, and we have seen that trend continue. Youth unemployment accounts for over 40 per cent of the increase in unemployment over the last 12 months. This is a problem exacerbated by the fact that a significant portion of these unemployed youths have few qualifications or skills and many have not completed their high school education.

I have had young people—and their parents on numerous occasions—turn up to my electorate office after being retrenched or struggling to find work to inquire about how the government can help. The government is committed to helping these young people and equipping them with the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in the workforce. That is why we have announced a ‘learn or earn’ policy, which means that young people under the age of 21 without a year 12 or equivalent qualification must be undertaking education or training in order to qualify for youth allowance. I think this is a step in the right direction.

The bill before the House today builds on the learn or earn policy. The National Green
Jobs Corps is an environmental training program that will enable young people to develop the green skills and experience needed for the jobs of the future. Up to 10,000 young people between the ages of 17 and 24 will participate in the program over the next two years, beginning on 1 January 2010. Participants in the program will receive 26 weeks of accredited training and work experience, as they work on projects that have a positive impact on the environment. It is, as we would say, a ‘win-win’ situation. The program is aimed at young people who do not hold year 12 or equivalent qualifications and who would otherwise struggle to engage with the education and training system. It will provide work experience and training across a broad array of environmental projects, including: bush regeneration, erosion control, developing community information and education projects, beach and dune rehabilitation, and habitat protection. The supplementary component of the program is an additional payment of $41.60 per fortnight to help eligible participants receiving income support payments meet costs incurred by participating in the program. It will also act as an incentive, encouraging young people to participate in the program.

National Greens Jobs Corps is just one element of the government’s effort to reskill Australia for a more sustainable and greener economy. Along with National Green Jobs Corps, the government has committed to a green skills program that will see 50,000 green jobs and training opportunities made available. This includes: 30,000 apprentices graduating by 2011 with green skills as part of their qualifications, 4,000 training opportunities for insulation installers and 6,000 green jobs contributing to environmental sustainability in priority local economies. This investment in people is also being supported by investment in the hardware that drives green technologies and systems.

The Teaching and Learning Capital Fund for VET is providing around $200 million to upgrade the capacity of TAFE to train in areas such as green plumbing, ecosmart electronics, efficient heating, ventilation, air-conditioning systems and hybrid cars. Green knowledge and research in education is also being funded through the sustainability round of the Education Investment Fund. That round will pump up to $350 million into supporting universities and TAFEs to research, demonstrate and apply green technologies to the Clean Energy Initiative and to transform the environmental performance of further education facilities across the country.

In my electorate of Chisholm, Box Hill TAFE, which I have crowed about in this place on many occasions because I would say it is the best TAFE in the country, has benefited immensely in recent times from the government’s increased investment in higher education, including projects supportive of green technologies. I recently had the pleasure of announcing funding to the tune of $2.7 million for Box Hill TAFE to develop a green skills hub, which will support the provision of training courses in the sustainability sector. The project is focused on the issue of sustainability, incorporating several green focused initiatives and training facilities for the development of students’ green trade skills. It will allow TAFE to refurbish existing internal training space and to install a new rooftop solar energy generating system, a solar training facility, a new rainwater harvesting system and a green plumbing training facility. This investment will increase the capacity of the local training sector in my community over the long term to meet future skill needs. It also supports jobs in a number of key areas, through the actual building of the facility and through the subsequent provision of green technology courses. Box Hill TAFE is already leading in many of these
areas, and this funding will ensure it has the space to teach its students proficiently.

Anyone who has been to Box Hill in recent times would notice that the TAFE is actually morphing the suburb. Every time you turn around, some new building is being built. They are very much on the go and they are providing a wonderful education base across a vast range of areas. It really demonstrates the vibrant activity that is needed within the TAFE sector. As always, I want to commend Box Hill TAFE for its great work. Projects such as this at Box Hill TAFE are occurring in TAFE institutions across Australia, enhancing their capacity to upskill and reskill Australians for a productive and sustainable future.

Many constituents in my electorate recognise the importance of promoting green skills as we inevitably move towards an economy that encompasses more sustainable industries and jobs. My constituents understand the need to take action on climate change and they are broadly supportive of the government’s policies steering us towards a greener economy. The green initiatives announced as part of the economic stimulus package have been embraced by many households throughout Chisholm. Indeed, many of my constituents were well ahead of the game and had been doing numerous retrofits to their homes well before any packages had come along, because they saw the need for it, had the desire for it and, I suppose within my constituency, had the financial capacity to do it. But more have taken up these opportunities since the new initiatives have come along.

The insulation component of the Energy Efficient Homes package has been taken up by 480 eligible households across my electorate. Despite what those opposite may suggest, there is real merit in this program in helping households reduce their energy use, thereby cutting energy bills by up to 40 per cent and increasing comfort in their homes. This is an important component of the Energy Efficient Homes package. It has supported thousands of jobs in manufacturing, distribution and installation during these challenging economic times. The insulation industry has been ecstatic about the support that has flowed to it from this program, which has helped to neutralise the slump in the construction industry. Indeed, a project within the community housing area in my electorate conducted by the state government to retrofit and calibrate the energy efficiency of homes has had an enormous take-up rate. We have had a huge response within the public housing sector to doing things in a more efficient way as well. We have seen groups come together to try to benefit, through a neighbourhood approach, from many of these things. It has been remarkable to see.

Similarly, the solar hot water rebate has proved very popular, with dozens of households in my electorate replacing their hot water systems with solar or heat pump hot water systems. The solar hot water rebate is helping people to save money on their power bills and reduce their household’s greenhouse gas emissions. Water heating is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions from the average Australian home, accounting for around 25 per cent of home energy use, excluding the family car. Installing a climate friendly hot water system can save a family up to $700 on its energy bills each year. This program is also supporting jobs in the emerging solar industry, which will continue to grow as we make the transition to a more sustainable economy. Again within my electorate, Gippsland TAFE in Chadstone has been part of the solar industry. We recently announced funding to upgrade its facilities, which is also a terrific thing for my electorate.
The two programs that make up the Energy Efficient Homes package typify the government’s commitment to supporting the economy as we move towards a low-carbon future. I am delighted that the government is supporting community efforts to go green through the funding of projects that promote greener lifestyles. Under the $40 million National Bike Path Program, the government is funding 174 projects across Australia, which will encourage healthier lifestyles amongst residents and create more sustainable communities. These projects will support more than 1,900 jobs.

I recently had the pleasure of announcing a $70,000 bike path in the suburb of Burwood, which falls in my electorate. The funding will be used to upgrade a section of footpath along the Burwood Highway to shared cycling extending towards Deakin University and neighbouring schools. Burwood is one of Victoria’s growth centres and a major activity centre of the state. This project will provide the suburb with improved transport options. The project will promote environmentally friendly lifestyles by encouraging people to hop on a bike while also supporting the local economy. I really encourage people in my neck of the woods to do it. It is quite hilly, so anybody who rides around my area gets a big vote of thanks from me because it is a pretty tough gig to actually do it. Building better cycling infrastructure means that cars are being taken off our roads and carbon emissions are being reduced over the longer term.

As we slowly emerge from the global economic downturn, we need to make sure the skills we teach meet the needs of tomorrow, especially as we seek to build a sustainable economy. Jobs are a key consideration of this government in the context of our policy response to climate change. We need to provide better pathways for low-skilled workers to transition into a low-carbon economy through the acquisition of green skills.

This bill legislates the National Green Jobs Corps, which will provide environmental work experience and training programs for young Australians, enabling them to contribute to the community and build their skills. It is a modern initiative that recognises the lessons of previous recessions, which have taught us that it is vital to keep young people engaged in training and the workforce. It is also a forward-thinking policy that recognises the green skills Australia will need as we move towards a green, sustainable economy. It will be welcomed in my electorate by young people wanting to broaden their skill base and by constituents who understand the challenges our environment and economy face from climate change. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.18 pm)—It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. The bill will amend the Social Security Act 1991 to provide for a national green jobs supplement of $41.60 per fortnight for eligible recipients of youth allowance, Newstart allowance and parenting payments who participate in the National Green Jobs Corps. The program will run from January 2010 to 2011.

I think it is really important at this point to look at the history of how we have come to be here today debating this legislation, because this issue has actually got a history. This program follows on from the Green Corps program that was in place under the previous government. That program operated mainly with volunteers. The people who undertook that program were in the age group of 17 to 20 years. Whilst it was not a requirement of participation in the program that you be unemployed, in reality most of the people who undertook places within the
Green Corps program were unemployed young people. The Green Corps program followed on from LEAP, the Landcare and Environment Action Program, which operated under the Keating government. The Howard government immediately ended that program when it came to office and replaced it with the Green Corps program. LEAP was designed for young unemployed people and targeted the age group between 15 and 20 years. It aimed to broaden participants’ practical know-how and equip them with new skills. They worked in landcare, environment, cultural heritage and conservation activities. The Landcare and Environment Action Program provided excellent training to a number of young people, as did the Green Corps program. There were a number of excellent projects, and I will talk about some of the projects that were completed under that program.

The legislation we have before us today will provide better access to training and to green jobs for young people who are unemployed. I think most members of this parliament and most people throughout Australia know that, when you look at unemployment, the area with the greatest numbers is youth unemployment. It is also hardest for young people to move from unemployment to employment. This legislation will assist low-skilled job seekers who receive youth allowance or the other allowances I have mentioned to undertake work experience. This complements the government’s compact with young Australians which guarantees a training place for all those aged 25 who are not employed in order to ensure that they have the skills they need to find employment as the economy recovers, or immediately if possible. They will obtain a certificate II qualification. This will be available for young people who have not completed year 12.

The $41.60 supplement that they will receive per fortnight for undertaking training with the National Green Jobs Corps will allow them to travel to where they are undertaking their training. Young people who are unemployed or on some sort of government assistance do not have the same level of disposable income that other people have. I think it is imperative that we show some support for them by providing them with some financial assistance. In reality, in an electorate like Shortland, which I represent, the $41.60 per fortnight probably would not even cover the transport cost because it is quite a spread-out area and in some places they would have to travel by car or a number of different modes of transport. I think the fact that this supplement will be paid to people undertaking training will be very beneficial.

This program has a twofold benefit. One is that it provides training to young people and helps prepare them to enter the workforce. The other is that it helps care for our environment, and the projects that have been completed under the Green Corps program over a very long period of time have done that. One of the areas in my electorate that is very dear to my heart is the Belmont Wetlands State Park. It is administered by the Belmont Wetlands State Park Trust. One of the Green Corps projects was to assist with rehabilitation and regeneration work in the area. It included a special event for National Tree Day, which was held in August. There was extensive planting, removal of weeds including bitou bush, bush regeneration and extensive mulching. The team attended the Belmont Wetlands one day a week over a 26-week project. Approximately 10,000 new trees were planted in conjunction with the National Tree Day event. They have certainly made a difference, and the area that had been denuded over a very long period of time is starting to come back to life again. To
a large extent it has happened through the work that has been carried out by young people involved in the Green Corps project.

It is interesting that one of the projects in that area that has been funded by the Rudd government through the Better Regions program is the $850,000 upgrading of the Fernleigh Track and that part of the track will be officially opened this Friday. It is a credit to everyone who was involved in the building of that pathway, which is a shared walkway-cycleway. In addition to that funding, $2 million—the greatest amount of funding given to any project under the national bikeways and walkways program that the Rudd government has in place—was given to take the Fernleigh Track from Redhead to Belmont. That complements and goes through part of the area where the work was done on the Belmont Wetlands State Park. I put on record too the work that was done by Hunter Workways. Ged Holohan was very involved in making sure that this particular Green Corps project flowed so smoothly. It is a credit to everyone who was involved in that project.

As I have mentioned, I have been involved over a long period of time in Green Corps projects within the Shortland electorate. I think what gives Shortland its very nature and what is very special about the area is its pristine environment. It is a coastal electorate that nestles between a series of lakes and the coastline. As such, we have the challenges of ensuring that that environment and our bushland are cared for. That is why these projects have been so good.

Going back a few years, I was out at Floraville Gully, which is very close to Floraville Public School, on a tree-planting day in the time of the previous government. There were some workers there who were going to be involved in supervising a Green Corps project that was to start within a couple of weeks. They said to me, ‘Oh, you’re the local federal member,’ and of course I proudly acknowledged the fact that I was representing the electorate. They asked: ‘What party are you a member of? Are you a member of the government or the opposition?’ I said, ‘I’m a member of the opposition.’ They then told me: ‘Unfortunately, because you’re a member of the opposition, we can’t ask you to come along to the opening and the launching of our Green Corps project. We know you’re very interested in what’s happening in this gully in Floraville. We know’—because I had told them—’that your children attended this school, but we cannot invite you along.’

I think that projects like Green Corps, projects that are benefiting the environment and benefiting local communities, are not something that you should play politics with. I think that members on both sides of this House should be getting behind and supporting them. I certainly want to see more projects like the Belmont Wetlands State Park rehabilitation that is being conducted as a Green Corps program, and it makes me extremely pleased to know that the young people who are involved in it will be receiving the $41.60 per fortnight to assist them with their transport and out-of-pocket expenses.

I thought I would touch on another Green Corps project that was recently completed in the Shortland electorate. This is to give the House a flavour of the work that has been undertaken by those people involved in the Green Corps program to date. This program was launched at the Gravity Youth Centre at Lake Haven. It involved work on a number of sites along the Central Coast of New South Wales, and it gave the participants experience where the project focused on areas where environmental sensitivity, conservation work and heritage restoration work was needed in the area. It was an excellent program, and those people who participated
in it walked away with skills that they did not have at the commencement of the program. It was very successful. The feedback from all those people involved was that they had learnt a lot. They were all young local people. They all came from fairly disadvantaged backgrounds. The project helped them develop self-confidence, communication skills, teamwork and leadership skills and also some relevant vocational skills. It gave them an opportunity to expand their employment related network. The one thing that it did not do was provide them with any assistance to get to and from the project. I seek leave to continue my contribution to this debate later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (INCOME SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS) BILL 2009

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate’s amendments—

(1) Page 3 (after line 2), after clause 3, insert:

3A Review of impact of student income arrangements

(1) The Minister must cause a comprehensive review to be undertaken of the impact of the student income arrangements implemented by this Act on equity, with a particular focus on the impact on rural and regional students.

(2) The review must:

(a) start not later than 30 June 2012; and

(b) be completed within 3 months.

(3) The Minister must cause a written report about the review to be prepared.

(4) The Minister must cause a copy of the report to be laid before each House of the Parliament within 15 sitting days of that House after the day on which the Minister receives the report.

(2) Schedule 1, page 4 (after line 14), after item 1, insert:

1A Paragraph 1067A(10)(a)

Omit “at least 30 hours per week”, substitute “on average 30 hours per week”.

(3) Schedule 1, item 2, page 4 (lines 17 to 20), omit subsection (10A), substitute:

(10A) Paragraph (10)(b) does not apply for the purposes of determining whether a person is to be regarded as independent for the purposes of Part 2.11, this Part or section 1070G unless subsection (10B) or (10C) applies to the person.

(10AA) Paragraph (10)(c) does not apply for the purposes of determining whether a person is to be regarded as independent for the purposes of Part 2.11, this Part or section 1070G unless subsection (10B), (10BA) or (10C) applies to the person.

(4) Schedule 1, item 2, page 4 (after line 24), after paragraph 1067A(10B), insert:

(10BA) This subsection applies to a person if the Secretary is satisfied that the person is required to live away from home to pursue his or her chosen course of education.

(5) Schedule 1, item 2, page 5 (lines 13 and 14), omit “30 June 2010”, substitute “31 December 2010”.

(6) Schedule 1, item 2, page 5 (lines 18 to 20), omit paragraph 1067A(10C)(e).

(7) Schedule 1, item 2, page 5 (line 23), omit “1 July 2010”, substitute “1 January 2011”.

(8) Schedule 1, page 5 (after line 25), at the end of item 2, add:

(10D) The regulations may prescribe an audit process to enable the Secretary to verify that a person who is to be regarded as independent for the purposes of Part
2.11, this Part or section 1070G because of subsections (10AA) and (10BA) continues to meet the requirements of those subsections.

(10E) Regulations made for the purposes of subsection (10D) may include a requirement that such a person periodically provide relevant information to the Secretary, including evidence capable of satisfying the Secretary that the person continues to live away from home.

(10F) If:

(a) a person fails to meet a requirement prescribed by regulations made for the purpose of subsection (10D); or

(b) the Secretary is no longer satisfied that the person meets the requirements of subsections (10AA) and (10BA);

the Secretary may determine that the person is no longer to be regarded as independent for the purposes of Part 2.11, this Part or section 1070G because of subsections (10AA) and (10BA).

(9) Schedule 1, item 4, page 6 (line 4), omit “,

(10B)” substitute “, (10AA), (10B),

(10BA)”.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.34 pm)—I would like to indicate to the House that the government proposes that amendments (1) and (2) be agreed to and that amendments (3) to (9) be disagreed to. I suggest, therefore, that it may suit the convenience of the House first to consider amendments (1) and (2) and, when those amendments have been disposed of, to consider amendments (3) to (9). I move:

That Senate amendments Nos 1 and 2 be agreed to.

These are two amendments that originated from the Australian Greens in the Senate last night. The government has had an opportu-
Question agreed to.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.38 pm)—I move:

That Senate amendments Nos 3 to 9 be disagreed to.

These amendments, predominantly sponsored by the Liberal and National parties, mean that the Liberal and National parties stood shoulder to shoulder together in the Senate last night to rip off 150,000 students and to rip scholarships out of their hands. The government will oppose these amendments on two grounds: (1) they would be bad for country students and bad for equity in the higher education system; they are rip-offs of country kids; and (2) they are fiscally ridiculous, causing an additional cost to the budget in the vicinity of $1 billion, with no matching savings.

I will start with the second of those points. There are times when the Leader of the Opposition wanders around seeking to make political hay out of questions associated with debt and deficit. At the senior leadership level of the Liberal Party, at the level of the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer, one would frequently hear them talk about questions of debt and deficit. You cannot be a political party that pretends to be concerned about questions of debt and deficit and blow a black hole in the budget of around a billion dollars, with no matching savings.

Let us be very clear: at the 2007 election the Liberal and National parties had no plans, no intentions, no projects and no policies to invest an additional billion dollars in student income support. This is a result of a shambolic set of amendments in the Senate, with no matching savings. They cannot be accepted by a fiscally prudent government. They will not be accepted by a fiscally prudent government. The only way the Liberal Party will not be characterised by rank hypocrisy on questions of debt and deficit is for them to not insist on these amendments. If they insist on these amendments, then each and every day between now and the 2010 election, when the Leader of the Opposition utters the words ‘debt and deficit’, we will make the very telling point about what a hypocrite he is in uttering those words.

The only way the opposition can get itself out of that position is to identify matching savings. The savings that are not part of the package of amendments before the House, which the opposition had previously identified, were savings to rip off students, and they would in no way have filled this black hole. They were simply not enough to do so. The opposition would have to identify the billion dollar cut to health, the billion dollar cut to other parts of education, the billion dollar cut to defence and the billion dollar cut to family payments that they say would fill this black hole, unless they want to be a laughing stock for all time on the questions of debt and deficit.

We will not accept these amendments, because these amendments are bad for students from poorer households and, most particularly, they are bad for country kids. These amendments would see a continuation of the system that has failed kids from rural and regional Australia. That is a system that has seen the participation rates of country kids in universities go backwards. Why would you do that? Why would you continue that failed system that has let country kids down?

Whilst the opposition has justified its new transition arrangements on the basis that they are about regional students, I say to the members in the chamber: ‘Read the fine
print.’ These transition amendments are not about regional students. They are about ensuring that kids who live at home get the benefit of full youth allowance—that is, they are about ensuring in the transition that, if you live in a household of incomes of more than $300,000 a year, you can still get youth allowance. So people need to be very clear about what these amendments are about. This is, of course, part of the Liberal Party’s failed strategy to rip 150,000 scholarships out of the hands of kids next year, to prevent full youth allowance being paid to kids who are in households of very modest means and to deny other kids an increase in their youth allowance rate, a prejudice to around 100,000 students. That is why they will not be accepted.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (12:43 pm)—Can I say at the outset that it appears to me that the Deputy Prime Minister is living in a parallel universe, or even in a fifth dimension quite removed from reality, if she thinks that she can continue to say that black is white and have us believe it. In that contribution the Deputy Prime Minister just gave to the House, she had the audacity to suggest that the coalition had proposed amendments that would cost money without identifying any matching savings. Perhaps she needs to get better staff, who will actually print off the Senate Hansard for her and show her that one of our amendments moved in the Senate, which the government voted down, was a $720 million saving in the budget which would have paid for the amendments that we were moving to remove retrospectivity and also give rural and regional students an opportunity to fulfil their higher education dreams. It is sad to me that she will stand up here and say things that are utterly untrue in the hope that it will be reported in the press.

The coalition has moved amendments in the Senate. I would note that the Greens, Senator Xenophon and Senator Fielding supported those amendments. Those amendments remove the retrospectivity from the legislation that would have seen the goalposts moved halfway through the game for at least 25,000 students who are currently in their gap year, who planned their futures, who planned their higher education dreams, around the rules as they were when they entered their gap year. Those rules have been changed on them halfway through the game. The coalition and, it appears, the Greens, Senator Xenophon and Senator Fielding will not support that retrospective change.

The second amendment came out of the Senate’s committee inquiry into the disadvantage that rural and regional students face. It was an amendment to put students who have to leave home in order to go to university back in the position they would have been in if the government had not introduced these changes to the Youth Allowance—in effect, removing the 30-hour work test that the government introduced and applying a gap year test for rural and regional students and others who have to leave home to go to university so they can access the independent rate of youth allowance. Both of those amendments were supported by the Senate, both now form part of the bill and the Deputy Prime Minister is now seeking to remove both.

The Deputy Prime Minister would also have people believe that the coalition is somehow responsible for the government’s legislative agenda. I know it will come as a surprise to some people in this House, but the opposition lost the election in November 2007 and we do not determine the government’s legislative agenda. I think many people wish the government would start behaving like a government and take the tough decisions that need to be taken, rather than behaving like a continual opposition. The government’s legislative agenda has been botched by the Deputy Prime Minister in yet
another display of the slipshod manner in which she manages the education portfolio. It was the government’s choice to introduce the Youth Allowance changes so late in the legislative year that there is virtually no time to turn these bills around in the Senate before the end of the year and before the 1 January start-up for scholarships. It was the government’s choice to delay this legislation until the very last minute. Again, perhaps the minister is being poorly advised. But, really, she has to take responsibility for the decisions she has made about the government’s legislative agenda.

Secondly, we warned the government that, by putting the Commonwealth Scholarships abolition in the bill that we voted upon a few months ago—the Higher Education Support Amendment (2009 Budget Measures) Bill 2009—they were in danger of abolishing Commonwealth Scholarships without replacing them with the new Commonwealth Scholarships. The coalition supports the new Commonwealth Scholarships. We support them starting on 1 January, but it is not our fault that the Deputy Prime Minister has so mismanaged this bill and this process that she finds herself in the position where she may well, on 1 January, not have replacement scholarships for those that were abolished some months ago. The coalition tried to help the Deputy Prime Minister. We warned her in May, we warned her in June, we warned her in August and we warned her in October that by putting the Commonwealth Scholarships in the wrong bill she would abolish them and have nothing to replace them with. (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.48 pm)—Can I just introduce some notes of reality into this debate. I am glad that some members of the opposition have come into the House, because I actually believe—and I have had the opportunity to talk about Youth Allowance with some members of the opposition—that there are some members of the opposition who have sought to deal with this issue seriously and have really thought it through. I would really seriously say to those members of the opposition: get to grips with these amendments, because they are not as they have been represented to you.

What these amendments do is, No. 1, engage in a further transitional change. Members of the opposition would be aware that the government has already made a transitional change, having listened to the voices of students. I met directly with some members of the opposition to talk about the question. We have already made a transitional change for students who are in gap years now and who need to move away from home to study.

What members of the opposition are being asked to do, in the further transitional change that is within these amendments, is to make that transitional arrangement for students who will live at home to study. That is, they are being asked to make that transitional change for students who may live in households of $200,000 or $300,000 a year. When I look at the members opposite here, I can see members from rural Victoria, for example, in the House. I do not believe that their constituents are calling on them to make a transitional change to make sure that students living at home, in households of $150,000, $200,000 or $300,000 a year, in cities—maybe in Carlton, 10 steps from the university, in a household with an income of $300,000 a year—get full youth allowance. So seriously think about what you are being asked to vote for here. That is the additional transitional change that is being moved by the member for Sturt, or, effectively, supported by him now in these contributions. I know the member for Gilmore’s constituents
would not be asking her to get full youth allowance for people living at home in the city in households with $300,000 a year incomes, and that is what is in these amendments.

What else is in these amendments is a continuation of the system that has failed country kids. The maths do not lie, and the maths tell us that, in the last five years of the current student financing arrangement, the participation of country kids in universities has gone down. It is a shame. It is a national disgrace. It is something that we should fix. You are being asked to continue the system that has failed country kids, day in, day out.

At whose cost are you being asked to do that? I think that is a very important question to ask. The cost is to the 150,000 students in your electorate who need a relocation scholarship to move next year but who will not get that $4,000 if this bill does not pass. The cost is to the kids from households on modest incomes like $40,000 a year, who will not get the full rate of youth allowance if this bill does not pass, when they could have. The cost is to those 78,000 who would get an increase in their part youth allowance or get youth allowance for the first time if this bill passed. The cost is: the independence age not coming down progressively from 25 to 22. And the cost of these amendments before the House now to the budget is around $1 billion, with no matching savings. Those are the facts.

The matching savings put up by the opposition were nowhere near the order of $1 billion and they were about ripping scholarships—including $160 million in scholarships for country kids—out of the hands of students. This is the opposition in its worst possible mode. What I will do is appeal again to the senior leadership of the opposition to make sure that members of the opposition are not implicated in a $1 billion black hole in the budget or in ripping money out of the hands of kids next year, including the ones in your electorates. 

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (12.53 pm)—I do not want to delay the House for too much longer but there are a couple more points that I need to make about the issue before the House. The Deputy Prime Minister thinks that she can blackmail the opposition into voting for these shameful bills by locking in the Commonwealth Scholarships to start on 1 January with the Youth Allowance changes. The minister, I think, has lost sight of the limits of her power. She does not actually control the opposition and she does not control the Greens. It is very rare for members of the coalition to quote senators from the Greens, but Sarah Hanson-Young, Greens senator for South Australia, put it quite succinctly last night when she said:

… the Deputy Prime Minister, in her cruel and twisted way, decided to punish those students because she did not want to fess up that she had stuffed up the policy in the first place …

These are not my words; they are the words of Senator Hanson-Young, from the Greens. She has summed up—in language that I would not have used—the fact that this has all become about the Deputy Prime Minister’s vanity, her pride, her inability to recognise that when she makes a mistake she should fess up to it and work with the opposition, as we have offered, to fix the problem. All through the year—in May, June, August and October—we offered to work with the government to bring about savings measures that would meet our concerns about rural and regional Australians and students in their gap year. In fact, the government voted against the savings measure that we put up in the Senate. So how on earth the Deputy Prime Minister can blame the coalition for failing to come up with a savings measure is beyond
me. Clearly, it would have been better if she had supported that savings measure or come up with an alternative and sat down and talked with the opposition about how to make this work so that students who would have been expecting Commonwealth Scholarships on 1 January would have been able to access them. Unfortunately, those students—and there are at least 100,000 of them—will hang around the Deputy Prime Minister’s neck throughout next year as they go without Commonwealth Scholarships because of the Deputy Prime Minister’s vanity and pride.

I understand that the Deputy Prime Minister has had a bad year—she has had a bad couple of years. Computers in Schools blew out by $800 million. There was supposed to be a trade training centre in every secondary school, but it turns out there is one in every 10 secondary schools. The schools stimulus debacle blew out by $1.7 million. The Deputy Prime Minister elevated advertising and praise for the government above spending on special schools and other priorities in her desire to praise both herself and the Prime Minister for the schools stimulus debacle. And now, finally, at the end of this year, there is the Youth Allowance shambles.

The Deputy Prime Minister has shown time and time again, with her slipshod management of the education portfolio, that a part-time education minister does not cut the mustard in a country of 22 million people, which happens to be the 15th-largest economy in the world. It is time for the Deputy Prime Minister to work with the opposition to bring about the kinds of reforms in Youth Allowance that we all support—reforms that are not retrospective, that do not unnecessarily punish rural and regional students and that do not deny students scholarships from 1 January, which is the current position she has adopted.

Question put:

That the motion (Ms Gillard’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [1.02 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr S Sidebottom)

Ayes............ 74
Noes............ 53
Majority........ 21

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. 
Bidgood, J. 
Bradbury, D.J. 
Butler, M.C. 
Campbell, J. 
Cheeseman, D.L. 
Collins, J.M. 
Crean, S.F. 
Danby, M. 
Dreyfus, M.A. 
Ellis, K. 
Ferguson, L.D.T. 
Fitzgibbon, J.A. 
George, J. 
Gillard, J.E. 
Grierson, S.J. 
Hale, D.F. 
Hayes, C.P. * 
Jackson, S.M. 
Kerr, D.J.C. 
Livermore, K.F. 
Marles, R.D. 
McKew, M. 
Melham, D. 
Neal, B.J. 
Oakeshott, R.J.M. 
Parke, M. 
Pilbersek, T. 
Raguse, B.B. 
Ripoll, B.F. 
Roxon, N.L. 
Snowdon, W.E. 
Swan, W.M. 
Tanner, L. 
Thomson, K.J. 
Turnour, J.P. 
Windsor, A.H.C.

NOES

Abbott, A.J. 
Baldwin, B.F. 
Billson, B.F. 
Bishop, J.J. 
Bishop, R.C. 
Briggs, J.E.
Wednesday, 18 November 2009

MS GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (1.07 pm)—I present the reasons for the House disagreeing to Senate amendments (3) to (9) and I move:

That the reasons be adopted.

Question agreed to.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (WORKING WITH CHILDREN—CRIMINAL HISTORY) BILL 2009

Report from Main Committee

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

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (1.08 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT (NATIONAL GREEN JOBS CORPS SUPPLEMENT) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (1.09 pm)—Previously, on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009, I was talking about some of the Green Corps programs that are running in the Shortland electorate. I was particularly talking about some programs for which I attended a launch on the Central Coast. One program in particular was associated with the launch I attended at Gravity Youth Centre. All of these programs were conducted in the Wyong Shire Council area. The particular program was the Budgewoi Dunecare program. It is an outstanding program. I actually went down there on tree-planting day this year. I have seen the fantastic work that has been done not only by the dunecare group but also by the Green Corps people who have been involved in the program there. It really demonstrates the environmental benefits that can be obtained from Green Corps.

There is difficulty associated with getting to projects on the Central Coast. That is why the training supplement is so important for those people who are involved in the project. It will allow them to actually attend the projects, to be involved in the program without
incurring extra costs. It is very similar to the program that has been conducted in the state recreation park at Munmorah on the Central Coast, where the volunteers have worked to reduce weed masses in the park, regenerate the bush and protect the habitat and have undertaken a variety of much-needed environmental activities. I put very strongly on the record that this is a good program that has evolved from the LEAP program, which was introduced under the Keating government and which then became the Green Corps program under the Howard government. But it did not remunerate in any way the people who were involved in the program.

I also would like to put on the record that a number of training skills that people need to have to be involved in these programs are provided by TAFE. I had a visit this morning from TAFE and they were telling me about some of the exciting green jobs and the training that they have available. I am very interested in those courses and I can see how those courses would blend very nicely with the Green Corps program and with the legislation that we are talking about today. I heartily endorse this program. I definitely can see the benefits for those who are involved in the program.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (1.13 pm)—I rise to also speak in support of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. This bill amends the Social Security Act 1991 to allow a training supplement of $41.60 per fortnight to be paid to participants in the program who receive Newstart allowance, youth allowance (other) or parenting payment. This new payment will be available for those who undertake the National Green Jobs Corps training between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011.

There are many benefits that will come as a consequence of this initiative. It will give up to 10,000 young people the opportunity to develop green skills through 26 weeks of accredited training and work experience. Importantly, this initiative targets low-skilled job seekers between the ages of 17 and 24 who are on income support. The added benefit is that this provides assistance to those most vulnerable in our communities, especially in times when there is a downturn in the economy. Of course, we are not just experiencing a downturn in the economy; this country has seen and been part of the global financial crisis.

This initiative also provides assistance to people who have left school without employment or who have lost employment early in their working life. This is a step up. This is a helping hand to give them skills to move on. This initiative enhances future employment prospects for these young people. It contributes to efforts to deal with future skills shortages, providing the necessary skills for green and sustainable jobs into the future. These are all important elements of this initiative.

In areas like my local community in the electorate of Petrie, we need to have experienced and trained people on projects dealing with bush regeneration, erosion control, developing community information and education—which is extremely important—beach and dune rehabilitation and habitat protection. These are all very important issues in my electorate, which has so many important environmental areas—waterways and bushland. Our backdrop is Moreton Bay. We have Hays Inlet, which is already an environmentally protected area, and we have many environmental groups working to ensure the protection of species in that area. We have the
Tinchi Tamba Wetlands, and again we have many fantastic local community groups working to protect that area. We have Cabbage Tree Creek, and we have groups that work along that creek to protect and regenerate the area and to help with erosion control. If people between the ages of 17 and 24 who have not completed their schooling and do not have a year 12 equivalent qualification are able to help those people to provide additional skills and help in these important areas of our community, that is certainly something that should be acknowledged.

The government is not focusing just on the protection of our environment through this initiative. The government’s focus is of course jobs. Our initiative encourages people to ‘learn or earn’ after they have left school. That is why this initiative is welcomed. It forms part of a larger commitment by this government to young people, especially through the Compact with Young Australians. Unfortunately, in my electorate of Petrie, especially in the northern end, the global financial crisis has had an impact on jobs. Even though the Rudd government’s Economic Security Strategy and Nation Building and Jobs Plan have resulted in lower unemployment rates than would have otherwise occurred, it is accepted that jobs have been lost and unemployment has increased.

Clontarf, in my electorate, in March 2008 had an unemployment rate of 4.2 per cent. In the March 2009 quarter we saw that increase to 5.2 per cent. In the Redcliffe-Scarborough area in March 2008 we had a 3.2 per cent unemployment rate. That went down to 2.7 per cent in June 2008, a welcome decrease in unemployment. But in March 2009 we saw that rise to 3.4 per cent. In the Rothwell-Kippa-Ring area in March 2008 we had a 3.3 per cent unemployment rate. In March 2009 we had a four per cent unemployment rate. In the southern end of my electorate, in Stafford Heights, in March 2008 we had a 2.8 per cent unemployment rate. In March 2009 we had 3.3 per cent. Deception Bay, a new area in the proposed electorate of Petrie, in March 2008 had an unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent. This area is now experiencing a six per cent unemployment rate. Young people in these areas are particularly vulnerable.

In areas in outer northern metropolitan Brisbane, a lack of adequate public transport exacerbates any downturn in employment opportunities. This is an issue on which I will continue to advocate strongly for improvements on behalf of my constituents and constituents in surrounding areas. These are, however, longer term objectives. What are needed now to deal with the effects being felt in my local communities and communities right across Australia are initiatives that provide opportunities. Programs such as the National Green Jobs Corps provide our young people with opportunities to learn new skills. I encourage the young people who are on income support in my local area to take up this initiative in the new year.

Participants in the National Green Jobs Corps will have the opportunity to undertake work experience and skill development, including 130 hours of accredited training leading to a nationally recognised qualification. I am pleased to note that there is flexibility built into this program to ensure that our young people with a partial capacity to work, or young parents, will have their hours of participation specifically tailored to their assessed capacity. It is very important that the National Green Jobs Corps is made flexible enough to accommodate these needs. We do not want to be excluding those most vulnerable in our community, especially our young people, from being able to participate. I am grateful that that flexibility exists.

As I have stated, the National Green Jobs Corps is part of a large compact of the Aus-
tralian government with young Australians. Under the Australian government’s compact with young Australians, all Australians under the age of 25 will have an entitlement to an education or training place, subject to admission requirements and course availability. Young people who leave school early without adequate qualifications are at high risk of becoming disadvantaged and remaining out of the workforce for extended periods, especially in tough economic times. It is, therefore, important to create conditions that maximise the number of young people who remain in, or return to, education and training to get the qualifications and skills they need to be competitive in the current tight labour market as well as when the economy recovers fully.

As a person who left school at 15 years of age and returned in their early 20s, I was the type of person that these programs are aimed to assist. I was fortunate enough to see the merits of returning to study at night school to further my schooling while still balancing full-time work. Not everyone is able to take this leap without assistance, without direction and without the support that comes from the Compact with Young Australians. I am certainly grateful to see initiatives like this for those young school leavers who have not completed their qualifications to be able to get back into training and the workforce.

The Australian government, together with state and territory governments, through the Council of Australian Governments, COAG, has agreed to implement a Compact with Young Australians to ensure that all young people under 25 have the education or training they need to improve their qualifications and ensure that they are skilled for a more productive and rewarding life. The Compact with Young Australians gives young people a very clear message by putting education and training front and centre—education and training are the keys to their own and Australia’s future prosperity and wellbeing.

The compact is designed to communicate the importance of education and training for young people, provide an education and training entitlement, ensure consistent standards for young people across Australia through a National Youth Participation Requirement, help lift attainment in education and training and qualification levels and strengthen conditions for some income support payments. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Minister for Education, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Social Inclusion, the Hon. Julia Gillard, for the development of this compact and the work undertaken by the minister with the states and territories through COAG to have this compact endorsed.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the work being undertaken currently by the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth, the Hon. Kate Ellis, for her efforts in the national conversation with young people. Recently two of my young people, Marina Kuchmenko and Taylor-Jo Connolly, travelled to Canberra to participate in the roundtables held by the Australian government. It is important for us to understand the views of our young people in developing policy, legislation and new programs. Employment is a very important part of that conversation. We need to identify new ways to engage with our young people, encourage them and support them to complete their education and to assist them to progress to either further education or employment opportunities.

I applaud COAG in the targets that it has set under the National Youth Participation Requirement. To commit to a target of 90 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds attaining year 12 or equivalent or certificate II or above by
2015 is an ambitious target but a target we must achieve if we are to give our young people the best start possible. It is also imperative to our aim to ensure that we have the skilled workforce necessary for a strong economy into the future. This bill and the National Green Jobs Corps are other positive steps forward in the Compact with Young Australians. This bill will provide opportunities to young people in my local area that are needed and welcomed. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (1.25 pm)—I rise in support of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Social Security Act 1991 to enable the temporary payment of a $41.60 supplement per fortnight to participants in the National Green Jobs Corps program who are in receipt of youth allowance, Newstart allowance or the parenting payment. The introduction of the supplement recognises the extra costs participants may incur when participating in the National Green Jobs Corps program and acts as an incentive to encourage participation in the program.

The National Green Jobs Corps supplement will commence on 1 January 2010, giving some 10,000 young Australians aged between 17 and 24 years the opportunity to develop green skills through 26 weeks of accredited training and work experience. Participants are to undertake work experience and skills development on environmental and heritage projects, with 130 hours of this training leading to a nationally recognised qualification. This work experience includes bush regeneration, erosion control, developing community information and education projects, beach and dune rehabilitation and habitat protection.

The program is targeted at young Australians who are most at risk in the current economic climate, such as individuals who have not obtained a year 12 or equivalent qualification. History shows that young people without skills or qualifications often need a strong support network. Students who do not finish school are three times more likely to be unemployed or go without further training than their classmates who do finish school. I have some further figures. Thirty-five per cent of Australians who have lost their jobs in the past 12 months are under 25 years of age.

The National Green Jobs Corps supplement complements the learn or earn policy our government has introduced. Under the learn or earn policy, anyone under 21 years of age must be in education or training to qualify for youth allowance, and that is appropriate. The National Green Jobs Corps is part of the $94 million Green Skills Package over three years to create 50,000 new green jobs and training places. The package also includes 30,000 apprenticeships to equip young people with practical job-ready green skills. Six thousand new local jobs will be established, which will focus on environmental sustainability in communities struggling as a result of the financial crisis. Four thousand training places will be created for long-term unemployed people in ceiling insulation installation.

This program demonstrates that the Rudd government is committed to tackling the dual challenges posed by the global economic crisis and climate change. As Australia emerges from the global recession, our attention needs to turn to shape our economy in that direction in the future. It is imperative that we build a green economy with green jobs and green infrastructure that will drive long-term and sustainable economic growth. As I have said on a number of occasions in this House, if we rely on high-emitting industries to drive our future economic growth, the current economic crisis will simply be
followed by a catastrophic environmental crisis.

In relation to the debate surrounding the potential job losses that may result from climate change policies such as the government’s emissions trading scheme, the government’s National Green Jobs Corps program and Green Skills ensure that new jobs are created in the environmental sector to mitigate job losses that may occur in carbon intensive industries. A report released last year by the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australia Conservation Foundation entitled Green Gold Rush outlines six key industries, namely, renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable water systems, biomaterials, green buildings and waste recycling, where there is strong potential to create green-collar jobs. The report further states:

With the right policy settings six market sectors currently valued at US$15.5 billion and employing 112,000 people could grow by 2030 to a value of $243 billion and 847,000 jobs.

The government understands this and that is why it is implementing a wide range of measures that tackle climate change and support the creation of green jobs. The government’s National Green Jobs Corps supplement program is one such measure. However, there is no single silver bullet when it comes to tackling climate change in an economically responsible way. The National Green Jobs Corps will combine with the ETS to support the transition to a green, low-carbon economy. Moreover, an additional $13.5 billion has been allocated to fund 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 manufacture of low-emission and fuel efficient cars in Australia. This year’s budget allocated $4.5 billion in the Clean Energy Initiative, which includes $2 billion over nine years for carbon capture and storage demonstration projects and $1.5 billion for large-scale solar electricity generation projects. These measures will support Australian businesses as they restructure their production processes to become more energy efficient and to reduce their carbon emissions.

Earlier this year, as part of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, the government allocated $3.9 billion for the Energy Efficient Homes program to install ceiling insulation in up to 2.9 million homes and solar hot water systems in over 300,000 homes. Initial reports from the Insulation Council of Australia and New Zealand estimated that 4,000 low-pollution jobs had been created as a result of this program. The council now believes that employment growth is even higher than these initial estimates. In my electorate of Lowe, more than 2,000 applications for insulation and almost 100 applications for solar hot water rebates have been received. The figures highlight the strong community interest and support in green initiatives. Just yesterday, the member for Eden-Monaro, the Hon. Mike Kelly, noted that in his region alone there is upwards of $900 million to invest in wind farming.

While investment in green technology looks strong, history also shows that skills shortages can quickly re-emerge after an economic downturn. That is why the government is focused on training and education through initiatives such as the National Green Jobs Corps supplement and Green Skills Australia. These initiatives support Australians seeking employment by offering new opportunities to develop the necessary skills for emerging green jobs. The ACTU-ACF report also highlights the importance of education in the development of a low-carbon economy. It is imperative that governments invest in all levels of education, particularly vocational education, to ensure
that Australians acquire the necessary skills to work in these green industries. This is precisely the aim of this initiative.

The Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill will develop the green skills that are becoming increasingly important as Australia makes the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy. I am pleased to say that the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Industry Group, Ms Heather Ridout, supports the government’s commitment to develop green skills and green jobs. Following the announcement by the Prime Minister in July this year, Ms Ridout said the government’s plan would address ‘a deficit in our national green skills capability’. I think it is important to note that Ms Ridout observes that Australia has a deficit when it comes to green skills. The reason for this is the Howard government’s environmental neglect between 1996 and 2007. Under the Howard government, the majority of its members, including the former Prime Minister, did not believe in anthropogenic climate change. It is no surprise then that they failed to invest—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr MURPHY—With the exception of the member for North Sydney, who I know is doing everything he can in the party room to accommodate the government’s desire to get its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation through the Senate this week. I am sure he will make a lasting and invaluable contribution. It is very difficult to invest in green skills, green jobs and green infrastructure when so many of the former government’s members, as the member for North Sydney knows, including the former Prime Minister, do not believe in anthropogenic climate change. That was the experience under the Howard government and, I am sad to say, that is why we are now suffering as a consequence. Unfortunately, scepticism still reigns supreme with some in the Liberal Party. Day after day, we hear from disgruntled opposition backbenchers, like the member for O’Connor, who do not believe the science of climate change and who continue to vote against measures that will enable Australia to take responsible action to address this great environmental challenge. I understand that even in yesterday’s party room this took place and that people were still challenging the science on climate change.

Mr Hockey—I didn’t see you there!

Mr MURPHY—No, I was not at the meeting, but I read media reports. I think the jury has certainly handed down a verdict in relation to the science on climate change. Climate change is here, it is very real and we have to act now.

Mr Hockey—I’m coming back.

Mr MURPHY—The member for North Sydney is leaving the chamber, but I am sure he will be back to hear the conclusion to my contribution!

Indicators show that individuals and businesses want to move toward a green economy, and this is a great opportunity for Australians to lead the way. Australia can take the initiative to create the technology and develop the skills to ensure Australia is at the forefront of this transition. We have an opportunity to capitalise on our strengths: Australians are innovators and creators. It is initiatives like the National Green Jobs Corps supplement that go some way towards realising that potential.

I urge members opposite to consider the scientific facts—that climate change is real and its consequences will be drastic—to put aside their scepticism and show some national leadership. Support our climate change measures. Support the creation of green jobs and green skills. I commend this bill to the House.
Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (1.38 pm)—I join my colleagues in supporting the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. The Rudd Labor government is committed to the environment and to the education and training of young Australians. This bill introduces a new temporary National Green Jobs Corps supplement to assist low-skilled job seekers receiving youth allowance, Newstart allowance or parenting payment when they are undertaking the new youth environmental work experience program, the National Green Jobs Corps. The supplement amounts to an additional $41.60 per fortnight for those participants. The training supplement will be available for people commencing National Green Jobs Corps projects between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011.

That money, which I am sure will be welcomed by participants, is there to acknowledge the additional costs involved in undertaking the Green Jobs Corps training program—things like special-purpose clothing and travel costs. I hope it also reinforces to participants the importance of the activities and projects they are engaged in, and shows them the value that our communities place on the great work that they will be doing on these Green Jobs Corps projects.

The National Green Jobs Corps complements the government’s Compact with Young Australians, which guarantees a training place to those under the age of 25 who are not employed, to ensure that they have the skills needed for the economic recovery ahead of us. The majority of the participants, when they complete the program, will have attained a certificate II qualification. This is also consistent with the Compact with Young Australians, where job seekers aged under 20 without year 12 qualifications will be encouraged to attain either a year 12 certificate or an equivalent qualification.

As we well know, for the last year the Australian economy has had the dark cloud of the global financial crisis and subsequent recession hanging over it. The Rudd government did not wait to see how severe the storm might be or how long it might take to travel from other major economies like the US before it hit our shores. Instead we acted quickly, based on the lessons of previous economic downturns.

One of the major lessons that came out of the recession of the early nineties was that young people are the first and the hardest hit by rising unemployment as soon as the economy starts to contract. That has been confirmed in the latest downturn, with employment for 15- to 24-year-olds falling by almost 100,000 between August 2008 and August 2009. There has been a corresponding rise in unemployment in those age groups—up to 7.9 per cent for 20- to 24-year-olds in August 2009 and 17.6 per cent for those aged between 15 and 19. We also learned in the nineties that young people are the ones with the greatest opportunity, in a shrinking jobs market, to respond by seeking to improve their skills as a way of bettering their employment prospects.

With this in mind, the government have put a number of initiatives in place to support young people while the economy is still reacting to the global recession and local downturn. We also see this as having long-term benefits as we encourage young people to take opportunities to increase their skills and qualifications to prepare themselves and the nation for the recovery that is already showing signs of picking up pace—a recovery that will present a whole new set of challenges and opportunities as, one way or another, we head into an era of energy and water efficiency, carbon emission reduction and environmental regeneration.
As I mentioned earlier, the government's overarching response to the challenge of skilling young Australians and providing them with the means to a brighter future is through the Compact with Young Australians. The compact requires young people to complete year 10 and then be in full-time education, training or employment until the age of 17—"learn or earn", as it has been known in Queensland for quite a few years now. For our part, the government will offer a training entitlement to all 15- to 24-year-olds. We are also working with the state governments to provide improved support through career advice and better assistance with the transition through school to further training and work. I will return to that initiative a bit later on.

On top of those initiatives, in July this year the Prime Minister announced the creation of 50,000 new green jobs and training places. The National Green Jobs Corps is part of this package of measures designed to give young Australians the opportunity to develop new skills and start on the path to long-term jobs—long-term jobs in the emerging industries of the future. The National Green Jobs Corps gives young unemployed people the opportunity to contribute to their community and build their skills through participating in an environmental work experience and training program. The National Green Jobs Corps provides environmental work experience and training places for young Australians aged 17 to 24 who care about the environment and have an interest in developing skills to work in green industries.

The objectives of the Green Jobs Corps are: to help equip young Australians with the skills to fill employment opportunities in emerging green and climate change related industries, particularly where there is an urgent need for work to avoid damage to environmental or heritage assets, and improve our readiness for the impact of climate change; to provide young Australians with work experience and training opportunities in structured projects that focus on the conservation, protection and rejuvenation of Australia's natural environment, and the restoration of cultural heritage; to promote connections between young Australians and the community; and to provide personal development, including teamwork and leadership skills and job preparation skills.

As I said, a total of 10,000 places will be made available over the period 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2011. As a place may have more than one person fill the place over time, it is expected that more than 10,000 young people will participate in the National Green Jobs Corps over the life of the program. The National Green Jobs Corps supplement, which we are discussing and debating today, is designed to support young low-skilled participants undertaking National Green Jobs Corps in recognition of the costs that they may incur as a result of their participation. It is an important incentive for young people to participate in the program.

There is no doubt that there is demand for these kinds of training opportunities in my electorate. An example of this was when I congratulated eight Australian government Green Corps participants earlier this year when they completed a 26-week environmental restoration project at the foreshore area of Murray Lagoon on the edge of Rockhampton. This project gave the participants valuable experience in environmental restoration work. They worked at sites, not just at Murray Lagoon in the botanical gardens but also the bush tucker garden at the Yeppoon State School. Their work included planting and regeneration of native vegetation, site review and monitoring, water quality testing, weed control, building and installation of bird hides and viewing areas, and planning of community training days.
The team, managed by Job Futures Ltd, has worked in partnership with community organisations, with Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments staff, and they have also received terrific support from the Rockhampton Regional Council. This partnership between the community and government has been the key ingredient to the success of the Green Corps projects that have been happening across Australia for some years and will continue to be at the heart of the National Green Jobs Corps into the future.

I have spoken in here before about the work that took place at Murray Lagoon and what an asset the lagoon is to Rockhampton and how proud participants in the Green Corps project can be of what they have given to our community. They have enhanced amenity of that area in a beautiful way and they have really contributed greatly to enhancing the accessibility of that area and the environmental values.

In another great project, Conservation Volunteers Australia and the government worked in partnership with the community on the rehabilitation of the Sarina Catchment Green Corps Project in the north of my electorate. The project could not have succeeded the way it did without the terrific support and involvement of the Sarina Landcare Catchment Management Association. This worthwhile project helped to contribute to the protection and restoration of Sarina’s beautiful beaches and to increase community awareness of Sarina’s natural environment. The purpose of this project was to implement onground works to rehabilitate, protect and enhance areas of significant environmental value as well as to increase community awareness in relation to the natural resources of the area. Some of the activities included: natural area restoration including site preparation, revegetation and integrated weed control; propagation of native plants, plant identification, seed collection, cleaning and propagation and general nursery activities; fencing construction, bollarding and stock fencing; track maintenance; coastal monitoring including dune profile, groundcover, vegetation assessments and installation of interpretive signage.

I have inspected and celebrated the work of the team doing the work to restore Sarina’s beaches on a number of occasions now and those participants and the organisations that supported the project can be very proud of what they have achieved. I know that they have had a number of opportunities for the community to express its gratitude to them as well.

In closing, the National Green Jobs Corps will enable young Australians to develop the green skills and experience needed for jobs in the future. This bill is targeted at the young Australians most vulnerable in the current economic environment, especially those who have not obtained a year 12 or equivalent qualification. This bill will provide work experience and training on projects such as: bush regeneration, erosion control, developing community information and education projects, beach and dune rehabilitation, and habitat protection. These projects will make environmental improvements now and help develop green skills that will be increasingly needed in the labour market of the future. This bill will assist those young Australians with an opportunity to participate in learning and education. It will help those young Australians who want to choose employment in the jobs of the future, the green jobs that we have heard so much about today.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (1.50 pm)—I am very happy to support the government’s amendment here and I note that my friend and travel colleague the member for Boothby has listed for consideration other amendments whilst not refusing to give assent to this bill.
I notice, as part and parcel of what you would regard as predictable comments by those opposite, that this government allegedly stands condemned for rising youth unemployment. What I did not notice in the preamble to the shadow minister’s statement was that in fact we have gone through and are still experiencing a worldwide recession. Australia in comparative and relative terms has done much better than comparable economies throughout the world, but that does not deny the fact that we have had rising unemployment and unfortunately, as part and parcel of that reality, that sad fact, young people are those that suffer most. It is not just those that are unskilled or not highly trained. We also know that it is affecting those that are well trained and, indeed, university trained as well. That is the reality. But to claim that this government somehow or other is the cause of this is ridiculous and I am sure that those in the gallery today would be tired of these types of arguments that have been going on in this parliament since cocky was an egg and decades since. We know the realities. The question is: what do we do about increasing employment opportunities and in the meantime in training and skilling up our young people as well as those already in the workforce? We need to carry out constructive proposals to assist them.

The Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009 is designed to assist young people, most notably vulnerable young people, first and foremost to skill themselves and, secondly, to do that by gaining confidence not just in what they are doing but in themselves while, at the same time, adding to our environmental capital and stock by involving themselves in green corps activities. We regard this as an important contribution both to educating themselves, gaining confidence skills and life skills, and at the same time, as I mentioned, adding to our capital stock for the environment.

To comment again on the amendment moved by the member for Boothby, I remind all members in this place, and indeed the public generally, that this government has sought—along with its jobs compact with Australia through the COAG agreements, or with our Commonwealth partners—to introduce more incentives for people to take on young employees in particular. Indeed, ‘Christmas bonus for apprentice takers’ is heading my Christmas edition of The Bottom Line, which is my newsletter. What we have done, for the record, is triple the bonus for employers who put on an apprentice essentially this summer. Under the Apprentice Kickstart program—that is a good name for it—employers who put on a new first-year apprentice in a traditional trade will receive $4,850 which consists of a $2,350 commencement bonus—up from $1,500—plus another $2,500 at nine months.

It is not the be-all-and-end-all, it is not the bee’s knees, but it is a significant contribution to employers as an incentive to take on young people, particularly at this difficult time in the economy. We are still recovering; we have a long way to go. Having travelled recently, I can tell you that the US economy, which drives so much of China’s exports, is still in the doldrums. We have to remember this. I believe we have two years of cautious optimism to look forward to. The important thing is that we offer incentives to employers. And what better time to do it than now? We have got kids coming out of schools; we are encouraging them to be better educated—what better time for employers to take on these young people? But they have got to be quick because there are only 21,000 places at this stage up for grabs nationwide. It is first in, best dressed to take up these incentives. The bonus comes just in time for the end of the school year, as I mentioned,
enticing employers to consider hiring an apprentice. For the record, Kickstart is open from 1 December 2009 until the 21,000 positions nationwide are taken up. It will be available to employers who take on a traditional trade apprentice aged between 15 and 19 years. I encourage anyone who is interested in this to check out our website at www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au. I think this is a great incentive to try to assist employers to take on young apprentices, particularly at this time of the year.

In the little bit of time I have available to me before I am rudely interrupted by question time, I would like to enlighten colleagues on more of the content of this very important bill before us. What is the purpose of the bill? The purpose of the bill is to amend the Social Security Act 1991 to enable the temporary payment of a $41.60 supplement per fortnight to participants in the National Green Jobs Corps program who are in receipt of youth allowance, Newstart allowance or a parenting payment. The supplement is to be payable to those people who participate in the National Green Jobs Corps between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. The National Green Jobs Corps complements the government’s compact—as I mentioned earlier—with young Australians. It guarantees a training place for those under the age of 25 who are not employed, to ensure that they have the skills needed for the economic recovery. The majority of the participants, when they complete the program, will have attained at least a certificate level II qualification. This is also consistent with the compact with young Australians in which job seekers aged under 20, without year 12 education, are encouraged to attain a year 12 equivalent qualification.

The package is intended to serve two main purposes. Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, it is to help combat youth unemployment at a time of economic downturn in which young people—unemployed people in particular—are typically the worst hit. Secondly, it is to assist in tackling environmental problems and the impacts of climate change. So it has a double purpose: to assist those people most vulnerable, particularly unemployed young people, and give them training and skills, including confidence skills and life skills, at a most difficult time—we have gone through one of the worst economic recessions the world has seen, but of course that is rarely recognised by those opposite; and, secondly, to tackle the important area of green jobs and support the environment by combating what many on the opposite side claim does not exist at all—climate change and the negative impacts of that.

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

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—In deference to the member for Braddon, who we all wait with bated breath to hear later on, I beg to inform the House that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts will be absent from question time today and tomorrow as he is attending a Coral Triangle Initiative ministerial meeting in the Solomon Islands. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr TURNBULL (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his repeated denials that any special deal has been offered to the asylum seekers that were aboard the Oceanic Viking, and I ask the Prime Minister whether
he has seen Dennis Shanahan’s column in the Australian today which states:

… they have wrung a special deal from the Rudd government.

Or the column of Greg Sheridan, who writes that the Prime Minister must stop:

… telling the most outrageous lies about Australian foreign policy.

Or the column by Paul Kelly, who writes that the Prime Minister:

… seems to think almost any line can be spun and will be believed, even when it is nonsense.

Will the Prime Minister finally stop treating the Australian public like mugs and admit he has used a special deal to entice the asylum seekers from the Oceanic Viking?

Mr RUDD—We know when logic has departed, hyperbole arrives. This is a question based upon the observations of a range of journalists for whom we may have individual respect, yet some corporate doubt, but I leave that for those in the gallery to contemplate. I simply say what I have said before: the good thing about our country is freedom of speech. Part of that freedom of speech is having a robust debate, including newspapers like the Australian. The editor of the Australian says he edits a right-wing newspaper. Good on him; he does, and it is part and parcel of the robust debate in this country. I welcome the contributions of all of those individuals. It is part and parcel of the vitality of Australia’s democracy. And we may agree or we may disagree, but every organisation, every media outlet, including that whose editor describes it as a right-wing newspaper—or someone told me a centre-right-wing newspaper; I am told that makes a difference—should be entitled in our great democracy to have their say.

The honourable gentleman’s question goes to the arrangements pertaining to the individuals on this vessel. Again I would draw the honourable gentleman’s attention to the letter of the secretary of the immigration department dated 16 November. The Leader of the Opposition does not like the contents of that letter because it simply refers to the approach which has been adopted in the case of this vessel and those who are on it as being consistent with general resettlement procedures. The special deal sought by those on this vessel was to be brought to Australia for processing. That is what has occurred; the special deal being sought by those on the vessel was to be brought to Australia for processing. From day one those on this vessel have demanded a special deal of being brought to Australia for processing and from day one the Australian government has refused and said they should be processed in Indonesia, and that is what will happen. Our policy is consistent on this.

I say to those opposite: where is your policy? Where is it on border protection? Where is it even on how this individual should be processed? In fact, I have noted some interesting comments on that this morning from the good old shadow minister for immigration—but more of that in question time today.

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr GIBBONS (2.04 pm)—My question is directed to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister update the House on recent developments in renewable energy and progress towards a carbon pollution reduction scheme in Australia?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable gentleman for his question. On climate change and action on renewable energy, the government is getting on with the job. Firstly, we passed the renewable energy target legislation, which those opposite did nothing about for 12 years. Secondly, we are in the process of seeking to obtain passage—

Mr Hunt—you can’t just make things up like that!
Mr Rudd—I hear the interjections from those opposite. Where was the renewable energy target legislation introduced by the previous government up to 20 per cent or anything approaching that? I can’t remember it. It took us to promise it to the Australian people, and us to legislate it.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Mr Rudd—the more the member for Flinders interjects, the more he doth protest and the more he doth protest too much. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the second arm of our strategy and the third is our direct investment in renewable energy technologies.

Today it was my privilege to be at the launch of Infgen’s Capital Wind Farm at Bungendore. This will be the largest wind farm in New South Wales. It joins around 50 wind farms already in operation around the nation and it will boost the nation’s wind power capacity by more than 10 per cent. Sixty-seven turbines on this particular wind farm are generating power capable of supplying some 60,000 homes. Capital Wind Farm has helped train the world’s first wind energy apprentices in electrotechnology—wind, electricity, apprentices. I met three of them this morning and they have a fantastic opportunity at this particular project. But looking at this broadly, across the world, what we have is an explosion of renewable energy technology investment. In wind energy itself last year, and more broadly in renewable energy technologies, we saw US$120 billion invested. That was up from $63 billion just two years before. More than 80 countries around the world have now commenced wind farms and the industry around the world is now employing some 400,000 people. This sort of investment will be encouraged in the future by the renewable energy target legislation.

On top of that, of course, we have the introduction of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. As I said to my good friend and colleague the member for Groom, we are engaged and continue to be engaged in good-faith negotiations with himself and with Leader of the Opposition in the House. What is occurring in the Senate does cause us some concern. We know that the Senate yesterday voted against sitting last night on this matter. They voted yesterday against bringing the matter on for debate. But I am informed today that the debate has commenced in the Senate or is about to commence. This is a good thing. But I am still concerned about what is actually happening in the overall ranks of the coalition and Liberal Party room.

There were some reports yesterday that some 10 people opposite stood to their feet and opposed the course of action being embraced in these good-faith negotiations by the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Groom. It was then put out, apparently, that those 10 party room dissenters did not represent a majority view and that more than that spoke in favour. Then again I see a report from one coalition MP instead claiming today in the Adelaide Advertiser:

“There were no speakers in favour other than Turnbull himself and Macfarlane,” …

Who knows what the truth of all that is? There is an internal problem within the coalition on these matters, but I encourage the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Groom to continue in this debate.

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

Mr Rudd—we are dealing with a reality now in the Senate where the leader of the Liberal Party opposition in the Senate says as follows in response to a question yesterday, 17 November, from David Speers:
David Speers: Isn’t this a problem for the government? Even if they meet all your demands there is no certainty that you will vote for it? This is yesterday.

Senator Minchin: No, that’s correct. We said that at the outset. That’s the risk the government took in bringing in this legislation.

In other words, as of yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, which is where these matters are now being deliberated, says that even if we negotiate an outcome with the Leader of the Opposition and with their negotiator, the member for Groom, Senator Minchin may not cop this. Can I say to those opposite: we want to continue these good-faith negotiations with the Liberal Party and the National Party, but what we would actually like is for the Leader of the Opposition to assure us that these negotiations have substance. We have said that we are prepared to deal on agriculture. Can I say to the Leader of the Opposition: it is important that he provides an assurance to the parliament of the nation today that they will not block a vote on this in the Senate, that these are good-faith negotiations and that they will be brought to a conclusion, because the nation is demanding action on climate change, not further delay.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The SPEAKER (2.10 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the President of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Mr James Tanis. On behalf of the House, I extend to him a very warm welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Asylum Seekers**

Mr TURNBULL (2.10 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister state firmly and clearly on the record, for the benefit of the House and the Australian people, that before the government’s offer was put to the 78 asylum seekers on board the Oceanic Viking that offer was not communicated to him or approved by him?

Mr Rudd—I stand by everything I have said in this chamber before. I was quite clear in my statements when these were raised I think the day before yesterday, following which the Leader of the Opposition went outside and said I had misrepresented the parliament. If he has something further to add, let him stand on his feet and provide that evidence now.

**Climate Change**

Mr GEORGANAS (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change. Why is it important to take action on climate change and what might prevent this from occurring?

Mr Pyne interjecting—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat. I simply put it to the Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the House that the quarrel they had after question time yesterday will not continue during this question time. If they want to deal with this quarrel, I will give them the opportunity to leave the chamber and deal with it. But I think to continue on today is unnecessary as it was unnecessary yesterday. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The minister has the call. I simply say that sometimes I surprise myself at the risks I take. The minister has the call.

Mr COMBET—I thank the member for Hindmarsh for the question. This country needs to act as part of a global effort to pre-
vent the most severe impacts of climate change. In fact, the IPCC report predicts that, without action against climate change, global temperatures will increase by up to five or six degrees by the end of this century. In fact, the record shows that 13 of the last 14 years have been the warmest on record. We will be exposed to drought and we will be exposed to more intense and extreme weather events, including bushfires and heat waves, without taking action against climate change. Australia has already experienced an unusually hot second half of 2009. The Bureau of Meteorology reports that the mean temperature for the five months to November has averaged 1.38 degrees Celsius above the average from 1961 to 1990. So taking action against climate change is critical. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the centrepiece of the government’s efforts to bring down emissions. Disunity on display right now in the coalition is threatening action against taking on the threat of climate change.

As I remarked yesterday, the opposition is split into two camps, and I want to acknowledge those on the opposite side who hold the view that we need to take action against climate change. But they are of course up against the sceptics led by Senator Minchin. Senator Bernardi seems to be a disciple in this respect and, emboldened by Senator Minchin, he has offered this contribution in the debate that took place on Four Corners, a debate amongst those who are members of the coalition. Senator Bernardi had this to say: ‘The earth is not actually warming. We still have rainfall falling.’ Thankfully it is not rising. ‘We still have crops growing. We can go outside and not cook.’ These comments not only are bizarre but are wrong. We have already seen warming of 0.9 degrees Celsius since 1950 in this country. South Australia, where Senator Bernardi is from, is the nation’s driest state, and climate change will put at risk a large part of the state’s $3.6 billion agricultural industry.

He is not alone of course. The member for Barker goes so far as to seemingly welcome climate change. He had this to say in the second reading debate:

I can assure you that in fact more people will die from global cooling because coldness causes more deaths than heat ever does and ever will.

And this is despite the fact that there were in excess of 370 heat related deaths in Victoria in the heatwaves at the beginning of this year. But the sceptics group in the coalition simply will not attend to the evidence that is available. The member for Hume, to whom I referred yesterday also, had this to say in the CPRS second reading debate:

Carbon dioxide, for the information of the House, feeds plants. It is a potent fertiliser—

... ...

In other words, there are people alive today thanks to extra carbon in the atmosphere. What the member for Hume is missing is that it is the rising concentrations of CO2 and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that are contributing to global warming. The fact is that there is expected to be a 40 per cent increase in drought frequency by the year 2070 in New South Wales, for example, and over a doubling of heat related deaths in Sydney by 2020. Is this of no concern to those in that camp in the coalition?

All of the members of the coalition opposite should support the negotiations between the government and the opposition and support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. It is extremely important for this country that the views of the sceptics not be allowed to block possible agreement with the government which would result in the passage of the CPRS. Climate change is a great and important challenge for this country, and the national interest will be best served by sensible and responsible action by all of us.
Those of you in that camp of the sceptics, led by Senator Minchin and backed up by the member for O’Connor, the member for Tangney and others who spoke in the Liberal party room opposing negotiations with the government, opposing climate science, should look at the evidence, take responsibility and act in the national interest.

**Asylum Seekers**

Mr **TURNBULL** (2.18 pm)—My question is once again to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister inform the House about the details of the arrangements promised to the 56 remaining asylum seekers expected to shortly disembark the *Oceanic Viking*? How do these arrangements differ from those that apply to the thousands of other asylum seekers in Indonesian facilities now awaiting resettlement?

Mr **RUDD**—The Leader of the Opposition asks about the processes which apply to the individuals currently on board the vessel. Can I draw his attention first of all to the correspondence from the secretary of the department of immigration dated 16 November, which describes the non-extraordinary nature of the procedures which apply here. Secondly, can I draw the honourable member’s attention to the further letter which was tabled on Monday, which is the message which was drafted by the minister-counsellor for immigration at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. These two documents were tabled in the House on Monday. One concerned the generic procedures which apply and the circumstances which go to the Indonesians and ourselves as far as this vessel is concerned and, secondly, to those things which have been provided to the vessel in Indonesia.

Can I say to those opposite on the very important question of arrangements as they pertain to those on board this vessel that we had a particularly interesting contribution today from the shadow minister for immigration. We ask for some consistency in approach on the part of all those in this place. The shadow minister was asked today: ‘So you think more people will be coming as a result of the government’s refusal to allow the boats to come, as the refugees themselves wanted, to Christmas Island?’ In other words, do you think they should have gone on to Christmas Island, Australia? So what did the shadow minister for immigration say in response to that question? She said, ‘Absolutely.’ In other words, her argument here is that if you therefore instead were to ensure that the boat went on to Australia—that is, to Christmas Island for processing—it would result in a better outcome in terms of, let us call it, a message through to people smugglers. I would suggest to the shadow minister for immigration that, if she is going to go out and make up lines on the way through, she should be concerned about the actual consistency of policy. Not only have those opposite sought to have no policy on border protection but they sought to have no policy on the management of this vessel until the shadow minister for immigration stood up today and said it would have been far better for this boat to in fact have been taken to Australia for processing. That is the logical inference from what she says, because she says, ‘Absolutely’ in response to the question: ‘Should we have acceded to the requests of the refugees themselves?’ If she has a different interpretation of that I wait for her clarification in the House, because that is the way it reads to us.

We have a clear approach to this. I suggest that those opposite instead apply themselves to some consistency of policy, the likes of which we have not had in this entire debate.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The **SPEAKER** (2.22 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon Mr Kim Hill, a traditional
owner of the Ngarriman and Jingili lands. On behalf of the House I extend to him a very warm welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Climate Change

Mr DANBY (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. What are the predicted impacts of climate change on Australia’s health system?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for his question. Given that we share most of the bay with our electorates in Melbourne, our waterfront communities are of course focused on the impact of climate change, but the impact of climate change goes well beyond those people who are living on our shores. It will impact significantly on our health system. This week I met with Dr Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation. Dr Chan was here as a guest of the government. She advised that the health effects of climate change are one of the key World Health Organisation priorities for this region. That is not surprising, given that recent reports prepared for the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, for the Department of Health and Ageing and for much other work prepared for my colleagues and others outline the likely health impacts of climate change globally and here in Australia. Some of this makes very sobering reading.

Climate change poses various potential health risks in Australia which are, as I said, not going to be just limited to coastal communities. There is likely to be an increase in deaths and morbidity due to the more frequent and intense extreme weather events such as droughts, heat waves, floods and bushfires. Of course, older Australians will bear the brunt of these disasters. We will experience higher rates of infectious and vector-borne diseases—

Mr Dutton—What about the extreme event of a Labor government?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has the call.

Ms ROXON—It should be of particular interest that the increase in rates of infectious and vector-borne diseases are most likely to be felt immediately in Queensland—something I thought the member for Dickson might be interested in. There are diseases such as Ross River virus and dengue fever, as well as food- and water-borne diseases due to changing weather conditions for vectors and hosts. The geographic ranges of some of these diseases are of course likely to change, putting new populations at risk. Water scarcity is predicted to become more common, reducing food availability, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables.

The increased incidence of extreme natural disasters such as drought is something that I thought those opposite might have an interest in. They have of course made representations to the government about the impact of drought and the mental health concerns of many in our rural communities, and these sorts of issues are likely to increase if change effects spread across the country. Of course, there are stresses placed on communities and the health system caused by internal migration and social disruption as people move away from coastal areas that are inundated by sea level rises.

These sorts of recommendations are public and on the record and simply add to the reasons for us to act against climate change. The government recognises that climate change poses serious consequences for the nation’s health and the health system and that urgent action must be taken to tackle this issue. We are not alone. The Australian
Medical Association and Doctors for the Environment Australia have both called for action against climate change and warned of the potential health risks—some of which I have just outlined—that climate change will bring. It is time to act. The government is doing that. We call on the Liberals to get on and act in the national interest.

Asylum Seekers

Dr STONE (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to reports that the asylum seekers from the Oceanic Viking will be separated from other inmates at the Tanjung Pinang detention centre because of growing resentment and tension about the preferential treatment of the Oceanic Viking asylum seekers. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the new fast-track access policy for some asylum seekers includes special protection in the detention centres?

Mr RUDD—One never knows with the member for Murray whether it is going to be an attack from the right or the left—that is, whether we are being too harsh or too soft or the Indonesians are too hard or too soft—and you can do that if you do not have a policy, other than the reintroduction of temporary protection visas, which saw nearly 100 boats arrive after that with nearly 10,000 people.

The honourable member’s question goes to the accommodation of asylum seekers in this particular centre. I refer to the arrangements in place for the housing of individuals at the Tanjung Pinang detention centre. Could I say in response to the honourable member’s question that I am advised that women and children will be housed in a separate facility adjacent to the Tanjung Pinang detention centre, and that is consistent with responses that we made to questions earlier in question time both this week and probably in previous weeks. Can I also note in that context that the Indonesian foreign minister has also said, ‘We would want to ensure that the best interests of the child and other vulnerable groups and individuals are properly looked after.’ Could I also refer to the fact that it has been the longstanding practice for Australian governments, past and present, to provide funds for international organisations, such as the IOM, for the refurbishment of detention facilities in Indonesia. So, as far as these individuals are concerned—women and children—of course there are separate and special arrangements being made. But I make the overall point that the accommodation arrangements for asylum seekers are ultimately the responsibility of the Indonesian government.

Economy

Ms NEAL (2.28 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline to the House the consequences for future jobs and growth if nothing is done to build a low-pollution economy?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Robertson for her question. Australia has perhaps more to lose than any other developed nation if we fail to combat and do our bit to reduce dangerous climate change. It is a sad thing to sit in this House day after day and listen to the climate change sceptics opposite denying the science, denying the reality and denying the consequences for our economy and for subsequent generations. They are in complete denial about all of the evidence, particularly when it comes to the importance of sending a price signal which will drive investment particularly in renewable energy, as the Prime Minister was saying before. They are in complete denial about the impacts on our environment, in complete denial about the impacts on our health and in complete denial about what it means for the wealth creation capacities of this economy and what it means for our subsequent prosperity.
We in this House have become used to this, because those opposite are in denial a lot. This country would be in recession if they had their way right now. They were in denial about the global recession. It was not going to happen. Stimulus was not going to create a single job and now they say it has created too many—they like being on both sides of the argument from time to time. It is tragic that a responsible opposition that purports to be the alternative government of this country can be in such denial about the basic facts and science of climate change and, of course, completely in denial when it comes to the benefits that will flow through to renewable energy. The Prime Minister spoke about that before.

We have a 2009 Climate Institute study that shows there is $31 billion worth of clean energy projects underway or planned in response to the government’s climate change policies—$31 billion. But if the opposition had their way they would starve the future of vital job-creating investment. That is their proposition in this House—starve the future of vital job-creating investment in the renewable energy sector. This is a very serious question but over there, like they were at the beginning of this year, they have no comprehension about what this means for the economy. Then, as now, they would sit and they would wait and they would see. If they had had their way then, we would be in recession right now. They are the masters of misjudgement. They are consistently inconsistent when it comes to all of these questions. There is Treasury modelling on this. The opposition are in complete denial about the Treasury modelling and in complete denial about all of those issues.

We on this side of the House will pursue the long-term national economic interests of this country. We on this side of the House are prepared to take the hard decisions those on that side of the House will not ever face up to. All they are interested in doing is playing short-term politics. We on this side of the House will put in place the policy settings for the long-term. We will make sure that we deal with dangerous climate change, that our economy becomes more efficient, that we invest in infrastructure for the future and that we put our budget on a sustainable footing, despite the vandalism in the Senate from those opposite when it comes to keeping budget measures. We on this side of the House are the party that is supporting jobs and we on this side of the House are the party of the future. They are the party of the past.

**Asylum Seekers**

*Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (2.33 pm)—* My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship’s annual report 2008-09, which states that the processing times for offshore refugees ‘continued within the service standard of 75 per cent of applications finalised within 52 weeks’. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the government does not normally provide offshore processing for asylum seekers within the timeframes the government has offered to those on board the *Oceanic Viking?*

*Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for her question and I thank her for reading the department’s annual report. Can I say that when it comes to the processing of individuals—be it in Indonesia, Australia or anywhere else in the world—two matters are relevant. One is whether they have already been processed by the UNHCR for the determination of their refugee status, and that can be a long or a shorter process depending on the complexity of the case; and, two, whether they have already been processed and, so determined, what length of time then ensues in terms of identifying a resettlement country. They are the two processes which...*
apply. In the case of this particular vessel, you will have a mix of individuals, some of whom have already been processed by the UNHCR previously in Indonesia, others of whom have not. In all these circumstances, therefore, the individual processing time will vary depending upon the case. They are the two categories of case we are dealing with and we are doing so in conformity with government practices, as outlined in the letter by the secretary of the immigration department.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: as the Prime Minister clearly has not read the report, I seek to table the relevant extract which shows that the processing time is within 52 weeks.

Leave is not granted.

Employment

Ms KING (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on recent developments around education, employment and workplace relations legislation, and the implications of these developments?

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much to the member for Ballarat for her question. I know that she cares about the future of education in this country.

Mr Tuckey—What are you doing about the MBA strike?

Ms GILLARD—The member for O’Connor is obviously off on a different topic. He so frequently is. In the last 24 hours, what has happened in this House and in the Senate is as follows. The Liberal and National parties have voted to punch a more than $1 billion hole in the budget. In the last 24 hours, members of the Liberal and National parties have voted to disadvantage country students. In the last 24 hours, members of the Liberal and National parties have voted to make life worse for small business and to tie them up in red tape. And perhaps the last one will not surprise people quite so much—in the last 24 hours, the Liberal and National parties have voted once again in favour of a return to Work Choices.

On the first of those two, on the bill before the Senate about student financing, which came back to the House today, the Liberal and National parties in this House voted for changes to that bill that would cost more than $1 billion. There are no matching savings. The shadow minister will say that he did have some matching savings, but, of course, he never had matching savings in the order of more than $1 billion and we would not join with him in the gross inequity of permanently cutting scholarships for Australian students, including a rip-off of $162 million of scholarships out of the hands of country kids. And in this House this morning, members of the Liberal and National parties voted to disadvantage country students. They voted to disadvantage country students by voting effectively to rip out of their hands scholarship money. Why did they do this? They did it to put in place a transition issue for kids who live at home.

Dr Stone interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—Obviously, the member for Murray, who is calling out about this, does not understand what she voted for. I will explain what she voted for. She voted for new transitional arrangements for kids who live at home. She voted for new transitional arrangements for kids who may well live in households of incomes over $300,000
a year. They may live in a city within walking distance of a university. She has voted for amendments for transitional arrangements for those kids to get full youth allowance—that is what she has done, justified in the name of country kids but nothing to do with country kids.

Of course, by standing in the way of this legislation, what the Liberal and National parties are voting for is no scholarships next year, because the Liberal and National parties have already voted for the abolition of the current scholarship scheme. What they are now refusing to vote for is putting in place the new scholarship scheme. That is, they are voting for no scholarships for kids next year.

Do members opposite realise what this will mean? In the electorate of the member for Sturt, 1,393 kids will miss out on scholarships if the coalition has its way. In the electorate of the member for Swan, 1,606 kids will miss out. In the electorate of the member for Herbert, 1,215 will miss out. In the electorate of the member for La Trobe, 751 kids will miss out. In the electorate of Wentworth, 1,121 kids will miss out.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Deputy Prime Minister is telling the house that the Youth Allowance bill has been defeated. It has in fact passed the Senate and therefore what she is saying is misleading.

The Speaker—Order! There is no point of order.

Mr Pyne—It’s already passed, so what are you talking about? It’s passed the Senate.

The Speaker—I warn the member for Sturt.

Ms Gillard—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The question that is before this parliament now is whether members of the Liberal and National parties will follow the foolish direction of the member for Sturt and engage in these rip-offs of kids in their electorates—that is the question. I understand that the Leader of the Opposition is a busy man and I understand that he has probably not taken personal carriage of this matter, but it is time for him to do so because he cannot, as Leader of the Opposition, defend a $1 billion black hole in the budget and he cannot defend ripping scholarship money out of the hands of 150,000 students around the country.

At the same time, the Leader of the Opposition may want to direct his attentions to what the Liberal and National parties are doing to destroy the prospect in this country of a national workplace relations system, a reform that the former Prime Minister, John Howard, set as an ideal for a long period of time. Why? Because the former Prime Minister, John Howard, was right that a national system would be better for small business. But yesterday in this parliament the Liberal and National parties came in here to smash and destroy the prospects of a national workplace relations system, presumably because they want to see small business tied up in red tape.

The Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal and National parties need to explain this conduct—a $1 billion black hole; country kids disadvantaged; small business tied up in red tape. It is time the Leader of the Opposition took personal carriage of these matters, or is the truth that the Leader of the Opposition already has personal carriage of these matters and, given his weakness and his struggle with the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, he needs to find a few bones for the hard right of his party, like making sure they vote against a fair workplace relations system and vote to bring back the Work Choices rip-offs? Is that what it is all about? It may well be, but Australian small businesses and country students should not pay the price of
the Liberal leader’s weakness. The Leader of the Opposition should take personal charge of this and fix it. He will be judged by his actions over the coming few days.

**Asylum Seekers**

Ms LEY (2.43 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the new fast-track access policy for asylum seekers—

*Ms Gillard interjecting*—

The **SPEAKER**—Order! The Deputy Prime Minister! The member for Farrer has the call.

Ms LEY—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the new fast-track access policy for asylum seekers offered to the 78 asylum seekers aboard the *Oceanic Viking* and specifically to the promise of assistance with housing. Will the Prime Minister inform the House whether this housing will be supplied from existing public housing and whether the asylum seekers will be fast-tracked ahead of other Australians already on public housing waiting lists?

Mr RUDD—We had a question from the left before and I think we are back to a question from the right this time. Of course, there is one fundamental logical flaw in the question, and the fundamental logical flaw is this.

Mr Laming—You’ve run out of public housing.

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

Mr RUDD—Ah! Coming in on cue: we have run out of public housing. I welcome the intervention. Who was it in the last 12 years who fundamentally defunded Australian government public housing in Australia? The coalition. Who was it who sat on their hands as the public housing queues in Australia went through the roof? The coalition.
since time immemorial. Fourthly, consistent with the arrival of refugees in this country or any other country, the normal provision of social services applies. That is the law and that is how it has been for a long, long time.

I go back to some fundamental principles in this debate. Those opposite have refused to take a policy on this throughout the entire debate. Their entire agenda has been to whip up fear and concern in the Australian community. They are being all fear and no solutions. Furthermore, here we are in this week of a critical debate on climate change, and not a single question on climate change. Not a single question on the economy. Not a single question on health or education. They are only interested in whipping up a fear campaign on the question of asylum seekers—the Liberal Party we have known for a long, long time.

From day one, those on this boat sought to demand that they come to Australia for processing and from day one this government’s resolve has been clear—that they should be processed in Indonesia. And that is what is happening.

Iran

Ms GRIERSON (2.47 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. What is the government’s response to developments surrounding Iran’s nuclear program?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the member for her question. As members would of course appreciate, the danger posed by the spread of nuclear weapons is a grave threat to international peace and security. The human and environmental consequences of the use of these weapons again are too terrible to contemplate. The more states that acquire the capability to produce nuclear weapons then, regrettably, the more likely it is that one will be used. Addressing the challenge of nuclear non-proliferation is a key priority for the Australian government, as it is for the international community. Today, unfortunately, the non-proliferation regime is under pressure, including from the destabilising actions of Iran, whose failure to comply with its international obligations has undermined international norms.

Members would recall that in 2002 Iran was exposed for constructing secret uranium enrichment facilities. Since that time Iran has been found to have been in noncompliance with its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, and has refused to comply with four binding Security Council resolutions. The most recent IAEA report, which was on Monday this week, confirmed that Iran continued to ignore its international obligations. The concerns of the international community about Iran’s nuclear intentions were underlined and reinforced by its revelation in September that it had been building another covert uranium enrichment facility near Qom. The IAEA inspected the Qom facility on 26 and 27 October. This initial inspection has raised further questions about the intended purpose of that facility and the timing of its construction. Iran’s failure to declare the Qom facility to the IAEA was not only inconsistent with its obligations to the IAEA but also gives rise to questions as to whether there might be other undeclared such facilities.

The latest report this week from the IAEA comes at a critical time for Iran. Iran has a historic opportunity for fundamental change in its dealings with the international community. The early October talks between Iran and the so-called P5 plus one—the permanent five plus Germany—were a very promising step welcomed by Australia and the international community. At the talks, Iran agreed to consider a proposal drafted by the IAEA under which Iran would transfer a significant proportion of its low-enriched uranium to Russia and France for fabrication
into fuel for Iran’s Tehran research reactor. This proposal represented a unique opportunity for Iran to reverse its course from confrontation to cooperation.

President Obama noted in mid-November that he wanted, as did the international community, a positive response from Iran but that time was running out. Australia shares the view that Iran needs to respond not only in a positive manner to that proposal but also in a timely manner. The Australian government fully supports further dialogue between the P5 plus one and Iran on its nuclear program, but neither Australia nor the international community can wait indefinitely. Australia has fully implemented United Nations Security Council sanctions against Iran and members will recall that in October last year I announced in the House the imposition of additional Australian autonomous sanctions.

I conclude by reiterating that Iran’s refusal to comply with legally binding United Nations Security Council resolutions is of serious and grave concern to Australia and the international community. Australia remains prepared to contemplate further action in this area. Iran is of course able to assert its right to a peaceful nuclear program. But it must carry out its non-proliferation responsibilities, it must carry out its non-proliferation obligations and it must conduct itself in conformity with United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Asylum Seekers

Mr TURNBULL (2.52 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his new fast-track access policy for asylum seekers. Given the Prime Minister says these Oceanic Viking arrangements are standard or, in his own special language, non-extraordinary, implying that all asylum seekers in Indonesia will now be resettled within four to 12 weeks, receive daily assistance with their claims from Australian officials and receive access to housing assistance, medical care, income support and help to find a job, has the Prime Minister sought advice on how many extra boat arrivals will result from this very public weakening of Australia’s border protection policies?

Mr RUDD—This comes from a party opposite which presided over nearly 250 boats arriving in Australia with nearly 15,000 people, and in the period that this government has been in office—about two years now—some 2,100 people have come to this country. And of course in all those circumstances what happens is a product of international security circumstances, most recently the war in Sri Lanka. What is remarkable about, shall I say, ‘special deals’ is the arrangements which those opposite had when it came to the Pacific solution. The hairy-chested statements: ‘All to the Pacific solution; not to come to Australia,’ and 60 per cent of those sent to the Pacific solution by the member for Berowra became permanent residents of Australia. Or, shall I say, the hairy-chestedness of: ‘We’re going to bring in temporary protection visas to show that we’re really tough,’ only for 90 per cent of those 10,000 people who were granted temporary protection visas to end up as permanent residents of Australia.

What we have here is a fundamental gap between what they say, what they have done, and what they would do. Our policy is absolutely clear-cut. What we have said from the beginning is that these individuals on these vessels will not be processed in Australia. They will be processed in Indonesia, despite their demands. We have rejected those demands, and processed in Indonesia they will be.
Health Insurance

The SPEAKER—I call the member for Fowler.

An opposition member—Not you, Chris!

Mr Ciobo—Which member for Fowler?

Mrs IRWIN (2.54 pm)—I like their sense of humour, Mr Speaker! My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Will the minister update the House on the late private health insurance participation levels?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Fowler for her question. I know it is an issue of interest across the community and I am pleased to be able to advise the House that private health insurance participation levels continue to grow and more Australians are taking out private health insurance. The latest Private Health Insurance Administration Council statistics that cover membership and data about the private health insurance industry were released on Monday and they reveal that there are now 9.82 million people covered by hospital cover with private health insurance. This is the highest number of people covered by private health insurance since March 1983.

The figures show that, since the election of the Rudd government, an extra 430,000 people now have private hospital cover and that coverage has increased half a percentage point, from 44.2 to 44.7. These figures demonstrate without question the strength and the resilience of the private health insurance sector, even during the financial crisis. This makes all the more ridiculous the claim made by the member for Dickson last year that changes to the Medicare levy surcharge would result in one million people leaving private health insurance funds. It was always a ridiculous claim, and the data makes it absolutely clear just how ridiculous it was.

It also highlights again the hysterical claims made by those opposite following the reforms to the private health insurance rebate that were announced in the budget. This fortnight the government will reintroduce into the House the legislation that was rejected by the Senate in September. This legislation is about making government support for private health insurance fair and sustainable into the future. We know that if we do not make these changes the current rebate will double as a proportion of health expenditure by 2046. In fact, we know that costs are already escalating. The Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook released a fortnight ago showed an increase of $276 million in rebate expenses since the forecast just in the May budget. This equates to an extra $1.1 billion over four years.

The changes that we have announced to the rebate, as many in the House would know, will provide a fairer distribution of benefits. I am sure one of the reasons the member for Fowler and those on this side of the House are interested is that it will mean that people who can afford to pay more for their health insurance should. We believe that private health insurance incentives should be being paid to support nurses, taxidrivers and secretaries to take out private health insurance, so that those who need the rebate to take out insurance will get it, not those like members of parliament or CEOs or millionaires who will take out their private health insurance irrespective of the rebate.

Unfortunately, these sentiments about making the system fairer are not shared by the member for Dickson. The member for Dickson and the Leader of the Opposition have been extremely ideological about this fight, but the data released today show that those ideological battles are ones of the past. This is about making our health system sustainable; support for private health insurance sustainable; support for those who most need our assistance able to be continued into the future. Our reforms are going to help protect
the strong balance between the public and private health sectors, and of course they will save $1.9 billion over the next four years.

We believe in a quality health system for all Australians. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party only want a quality system for some Australians. But introducing this bill again into the House in the next fortnight will give the Liberal Party a second chance to rethink their support for a fairer system and better support for the taxidrivers, secretaries and nurses who need our assistance, instead of the CEOs, members of parliament and millionaires who do not need a private health insurance rebate.

Charitable Organisations

Mr WINDSOR (2.59 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister and relates to the issue raised by Senator Xenophon in the Senate last night. Whilst I recognise that the legal issues referred to last night have been referred to the Federal Police, the broader issue of taxation exemption for certain churches and charities does require investigation at the parliamentary level. Given that there are many instances of churches and charities achieving a competitive advantage over the private sector by way of taxation and other concessions, does the Prime Minister believe that these advantages are fair to the private sector? Does the Prime Minister believe the United Kingdom legislation, where church and charitable core business is not taxable but non-core commercial activity is considered taxable, to be a fairer system? Will the Prime Minister investigate this growing grey area of taxation policy?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for New England for his question. I believe that the church and charitable sector does a fantastic job in Australia. If you look at the range of churches and charities, which I am sure members opposite and we have to deal with right across the community sector, whether it is in education, in health or in the provision of services to the homeless—I think of the Brotherhood of St Lawrence and others which have been formally historically associated with religious organisations—they do a first-class job. The second point I make is that often the best form of delivery of social services on the ground is where you actually have government working in partnership with church and charitable organisations.

Mr Hunt—School chaplaincies!

Mr RUDD—Now that there has been an interjection on another matter, I will come to that in due process, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—I would prefer that it is ignored and that interjections stop.

Mr RUDD—Mr Speaker, it does deal with the question of the cooperation between the church and charitable sectors. I am quite happy to take the interjection, but I will respond to the honourable member’s question first—that is, the excellent forms of partnership which exist between governments, state and federal, and many church and charitable organisations, whether it is in health, education or the broader delivery of social services. On the particular question which arises from the points that have been made by Senator Xenophon, the honourable member is right to say that whatever matters have been contained within that which contain any allegations of criminal misconduct are properly referred to the relevant authorities.

On the broader question, can I simply inform the honourable member of what constitutes tax exempt status under the Income Tax Assessment Act. The Commissioner of Taxation has responsibility for administering the law relating to the endorsement of charities. For a religious institution to get access to a range of tax exemptions and concessions, it must be endorsed also by the Commissioner of Taxation. Parliament has placed the administration of Australia’s tax laws with the
Commissioner of Taxation and neither the Assistant Treasurer or the Treasurer nor any other minister may intervene in the proper exercise of these statutory powers. Furthermore, the Taxation Office is required to carry out regular reviews of endorsed organisations and their operations to ensure they continue to meet the requirements of that endorsement. The tax office publishes details of specific areas of focus for review on an annual basis. Once endorsed, religious institutions are income tax exempt. As religious institutions are also generally charitable institutions, they can also access GST concessions and fringe benefit tax concessions—not broad exemption but access to some specific exemptions. For a religion to be considered for charitable status, it must be an entity established for a public benefit that the law regards as charitable. The advancement of religion in one form or another has been part of a charity throughout the history of charity under that law. That is the legal framework within which we operate when it comes to the specific operations of the tax act and the specific operation of the Commissioner of Taxation.

On the question specifically raised about Senator Xenophon from South Australia, as I said earlier today when asked about this, he has raised some serious matters—and I go beyond the allegations of criminality which were contained within his remarks—and we as a government will reflect upon those in terms of whether any further parliamentary action is appropriate. But we would like to proceed in a cautious and methodical way in examining those matters.

Those opposite, in a related interjection, talked about the role of school chaplaincies. As I have said here before, school chaplaincies across Australia do a fantastic job. We are firmly of the view that they have provided an enormous contribution to the work of local school communities. I know it first-hand from my own electorate in Brisbane and I know it right across the country in a whole bunch of different cities and communities where they are stepping up to the plate and performing so many of the roles which school counsellors would normally perform, often in school communities where there are no school counsellors.

**Opposition members**—Fund them.

**Mr Rudd**—Of course, different schools have different solutions and that is as it should be. I say to those opposite, though, who seek to interject in a partisan fashion that if this was—

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**Mr Rudd**—Those opposite have on this question. I do not think I am stretching the truth when I say that they have interjected in a partisan fashion. Were this to be such an enduring commitment on the part of those opposite, I would assume it would have been put permanently into the forward estimates beyond a simple three-year allocation, which is what occurred. I simply say to those opposite that, if the depth of their commitment was to be reflected in their forward planning and what they were going to put into place in the past, I would have thought it would have endured into the future as a permanent set of funding arrangements. Of course, let us never ask the question of consistency when it comes to those opposite on any matter of policy, whether it is asylum seekers, whether it is climate change, whether it is the stimulus strategy, whether it is borrowing to keep the economy afloat or whether it is any other policy.

On school chaplaincies, we believe they are doing a fantastic job. The minister has said repeatedly that we will conclude our proper review of these services and, as I have said in this House before, I believe chaplaincies have a strong future in Australia. I have been personally associated with their opera-
tion in Queensland in the past, going back to the early 90s. I am proud of that association.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before giving the call to the member for Makin, I indicate to the House that the interjection of the member for Flinders was not a supplementary question.

Maralinga

Mr ZAPPIA (3.06 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism. How is the government fulfilling its responsibilities to the traditional owners of Maralinga?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Mr Speaker—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the honourable member for Makin for his question, which goes—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Mr Truss interjecting—

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Obviously they are going feral today, as usual, Mr Speaker!

The SPEAKER—The minister will answer the question.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the honourable member for Makin for his question, because it goes to a very serious issue concerning our historical relationship with the traditional owners of the land in Australia. In that context, I am pleased to advise that on Monday of this week I signed, on behalf of the Australian government, the Maralinga hand-back agreement. This agreement, which I am sure is of major interest to all South Australians, represents an understanding between the Australian and South Australian governments and the Maralinga Tjarutja people, setting out the roles and responsibilities of the three parties following the formal hand-back of the former British nuclear test sites at Maralinga to their traditional owners. Following my signing of the agreement, the South Australian government introduced into the South Australian parliament amendments to the Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act to give legislative effect to the agreement, and I am pleased to say that hopefully the process will be completed in December and it has the support of all major parties in the South Australian parliament.

I think it is interesting to note that the hand-back of this land will complete the Australian government’s actions in response to the 1985 Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia. I remind the House that, in response to the royal commission recommendations, the then Hawke government agreed to clean up the land and return it to the traditional owners. Successive Australian governments of all political persuasions have progressed this objective in full consultation with the South Australian government and the Maralinga Tjarutja community. Most of the 3,100 square kilometre site is available for unrestricted access. However, as a precautionary measure, permanent habitation is not permitted in an area of 412 square kilometres which is available and deemed safe for casual access.

In terms of the agreement, I also indicate that it is not just about handing back the land. The Commonwealth is also engaged in proper discussions about a formal agreement with the Tjarutja community to assist that group in developing business opportunities presented by the return of the land, including potential tourism ventures. As Minister for Tourism I look forward to working with the minister for indigenous affairs to put in place long-term economic opportunities with the Tjarutja people. As I said, I believe that this agreement represents a practical example of reconciliation, hopefully bringing lasting economic opportunities to the Tja-
rutja people and, in doing so, not only giving them their traditional lands but also better employment and other opportunities in life.

I also bring to the attention of the House the fact that, unfortunately, the hand-back occurred just over 12 months after the death of Archie Barton, who for 20 years led the Maralinga Tjarutja people in their campaign to both recover their lands and have them cleaned of the consequences of British atomic tests. I am sure I speak on behalf of all members of the House in welcoming the hand-back and wishing the Maralinga Tjarutja people well for the future. This is a major step forward in our engagement and reconciliation with the Indigenous communities of Australia.

Hospitals

Mr DUTTON (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his promise, made now more than two years ago, that when it came to the states’ mismanagement of health the buck would stop with him. With revelations that lives are again at risk because of basic failures in Bundaberg Hospital, why did the government refuse to act on its promise to take over hospitals if they were not fixed by 30 June this year? Prime Minister, is it a case of talk being easier than taking tough decisions?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Dickson very much for his question. I am sure he will be needing a temporary protection visa once he returns to Dickson, for protection from his local constituents! He raises a question concerning health and hospitals; I welcome this question. I welcome it fundamentally, because the government, prior to the last election, said that we were sick and tired of the blame game between the federal government and the states because that was the game in which the previous federal government engaged day in, day out. If you want practical evidence of it, as the member for Dickson has obviously not provided in any element of his question, I say to him that $1 billion was extracted from the public health budget by the Howard government for the states. That flowed through to hospitals like Bundaberg Hospital. So what we had was this rolling debate between the Australian government and the state governments as to who was responsible for what. There was one clear response from the Howard government—of which the Leader of the Opposition was a member—which was simply to withdraw funding from the states, including from the public hospital system: $1 billion.

Mr Truss interjecting—

Mr RUDD—The honourable member opposite interjects, ‘That is not true.’ I suggest he consults the statistics. Secondly, therefore, they ask what we have done in response in terms of taking responsibility—

Mr Dutton—No.

Mr RUDD—He says he is not asking what we are doing in terms of taking responsibility. Well, his question was about the buck stopping with us—

The SPEAKER—I see the member for Dickson is on his feet. The member for Dickson knows that if he approaches the dispatch box I expect him to go to a point of order directly and not enter into debate.

Mr Dutton—Thank you, Mr Speaker. At the Prime Minister’s request, the—

The SPEAKER—No—

Mr Dutton—Just to clarify—

The SPEAKER—The member will raise a point of order—

Mr Dutton—This was why the promise was broken—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Dutton interjecting—
The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat. The problem I have is that the member for Dickson is a repeat offender in these matters. Now, I can easily give him the one hour but I do not really think that that is doing anything, because he has had six, seven or eight. I warn him—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I cannot name him without a warning. If you want to change the rules for me, you can change the rules. If you want to say that after four or five one-hours, they are out for a day, change the rules. But the member for Dickson is warned, and he will sit there quietly during the response to his question.

A government member—It’s his birthday!

The SPEAKER—It may be his birthday, but he should behave! Prime Minister.

Mr RUDD—Mr Speaker, I am sure that his constituents are celebrating his return to his electorate.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will go back to the question.

Mr RUDD—The honourable member asked a question about taking responsibility for the system—the buck stopping with us. I am saying that in the period since the last election what we have done is increase hospital funding nationwide by 50 per cent—50 per cent. You took $1 billion out; we have injected 50 per cent extra in. What does that translate to in dollar terms? Over the five years of the Australian healthcare agreement, signed by me and the minister for health at the end of last year, there was an increase in funding to $64 billion over five years in health and hospitals. That is some $20 billion more. That is what I call action. The honourable member for Dickson seems to regard that as inaction. Their action was to take $1 billion out; our action was to put $20 billion in over five years. I regard that as a pretty basic thing.

Also on top of that, for the first time there was a $750 million investment in emergency departments, a $500 million investment for subacute care, $872 million in preventative care, and $600 million for elective surgery waiting lists. Also on top of the above, there was $1.1 billion for the health workforce. The honourable member asked about the health workforce, for example, because it is about taking responsibility. What did we inherit? We inherited a health workforce shortage affecting 60 per cent of Australians, a nursing shortage of 6,000 nurses nationwide, and GP training places capped at 600 per year since 2004. We inherited, as far as the Australian government was concerned, an entire catalogue of neglect. We have stepped up to the plate in the here and now, as reflected through the healthcare agreement signed by the minister at the end of last year and which is now operational. That is step 1.

Step 2 is long-term reform. What the health minister and I have done since the election is engage in a series of consultations with hospitals based on the report of the independent commission, the health reform commission chaired by Dr Christine Bennett. Those opposite say, ‘This is something extraordinary.’ Let me hear them say what their reform plan was in their 12 years in office. Can anyone tell me what it was? I say to the member for Dickson: what was the health reform plan of the previous government? You had 12 years to have one. I just do not remember one. There was not a health reform plan—nothing to do with the hospitals, nothing to do with the totality of the health system, nothing to do with systemic health reform. They wanted to play the blame game.

We said that we would commission an independent review. We did so. Christine Ben-
nett concluded that, gave it to the government midyear, and we are now in the process of concluding consultations with about 80 public hospitals across Australia, right down the various centres along the Queensland coast, New South Wales and in every other state in the country. I think I have done nearly 20 of those myself, the health minister has done 40 or 50 herself, the assistant health minister and member for Lingiari has done the same, and of course so has our parliamentary secretary as well. Do you know why? We are road-testing the recommendations for long-term health reform with each of these hospital communities because we are determined to get this right. We believe health policy is important for the future because the health system is straining under the future demands imposed on it. Where we plan for the future, those opposite simply have a blame game for the past.

The SPEAKER—Before giving the call to the member for Lyons, I note that the Minister for Finance and Deregulation has been on his best behaviour today and I ponder whether this could be because the CEO, the outgoing President and the President-elect of the Essendon Football Club are in the gallery. If this is so because he is now the No. 1 ticket holder, they are not only welcome today, they could be in here every day and we would not get his impression of Ronnie Andrews every day! The member for Lyons.

APEC Meeting: Trade Policy

Mr ADAMS (3.18 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Trade. What were the key trade outcomes at the APEC meetings in Singapore?

Mr CREAN—I thank the member for Lyons for his question and his continuing deep interest in the matters of trade. Last week I attended, along with the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Treasurer, the APEC meetings in Singapore. This was the 20th anniversary of APEC. Bob Hawke was also there and that reminded everyone about the key role that Australia played in the formation of this organisation 20 years ago.

I am asked about the key outcomes from the meetings. The first was the very strong commitment from the ministers present and the leaders in relation to the Doha Round, not only because of the importance of it as an economic stimulus, a stimulus that does not impact on the budget, but also about its importance in stemming returns or likely returns to protectionism.

Another important outcome from the meeting was the decision and the announcement by President Obama to participate in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This represented a major contribution and commitment by the United States to trade liberalisation and it was a concrete demonstration of a strong ambition in this area. This augurs well for its commitment in relation to the Doha Round.

It was also a major commitment to the Asia-Pacific region, and was welcomed as such. The commitment is to participate in the development of this partnership as a high-quality free trade agreement, a 21st century operation with all sectors—goods, services and investment—included. The involvement and commitment of the United States brought important critical mass to making sure that this announcement carried appropriate weight, and Australia is to host the first of four meetings of officials next year to advance this. Properly developed, this can be the bridge to a free trade area for the Asia-Pacific, so this was a very important breakthrough.

Another important outcome was the commitment of those involved to decrease the costs of doing business in the Asia-Pacific region by 25 per cent by 2015. Obvi-
ously this is a very important commitment. It will add to the efficiencies and benefits of trade liberalisation in the region. An important study came out whilst we were there that showed that there was an APEC effect, that trade volume and participation were growing much faster in that region than the rest of the world.

Finally, the agenda that was struck at APEC going forward was terribly important as well in terms of more strengthened economic integration within the region. Not only is it a focus of reform at the border, with tariff reductions, and reform behind the border—critical, given the services and investment dimension—but also reform across the border, with a focus on getting more efficiency in logistics movement in the area. It was a very significant meeting. The benefit of the organisation is well established and it was a pleasure to have participated in it.

Aged Care

Mrs May (3.22 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Ageing. I refer the minister to media reports today that reveal that a coalition of nursing home operators representing 95 per cent of the industry has told the Prime Minister that the existing system cannot meet the burden of our ageing population. After two years of excuses and inaction, when can the families of Australians in need of aged care expect the government to stop talking and start acting on Australia’s aged-care crisis?

Mrs Elliot—I thank the honourable member for her question. The Rudd government is providing more funding for more services for older Australians than ever before. In fact, more than 6,300 residential places and 2,800 community care places have been delivered by this government since we were elected and many more are on the way. Over the next four years the government will provide record funding of $44 billion for aged-care services. In fact, under the Rudd government funding for aged-care services has increased by an average of 9.1 per cent a year. This includes delivering an additional $728 million for aged-care homes in the last budget. This government has substantially increased accommodation payments. In March 2008 we introduced changes that provided additional funding of more than $300 million a year when fully implemented, and that is primarily for high care. We have also made $150 million of zero real interest loans available with $150 million more to come.

The government recognises that there are many pressures within our system. These are pressures that have been able to build up for many years. Greg Mundy, CEO of Aged and Community Services Australia, has said: Aged care has limped along on a series of short term expedient patch-up solutions for most of the past decade.

That was said by Greg Mundy on 11 March 2008. As we have said, there are pressures in the system. The Prime Minister spoke earlier about our national health and hospital reform—

Mrs May—On a point of order, Mr Speaker: this is not a question about the past. It is a question about the future, about the crisis in aged care.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for McPherson will resume her seat. There is no point of order. The minister is responding to the question.

Mrs Elliot—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was just referring to the neglect of the previous government when it came to our aged-care sector and our health and hospital sector as well. That is what I was referring to in the comments of Greg Mundy, the CEO of Aged and Community Services. There are patch-ups that have occurred for over a decade. In contrast to that, since we have been in gov-
ernment we have delivered more services for older Australians, record funding for those services, and we are also committed to addressing many of the long-term pressures that are in the system through our National Health and Hospital Reform Commission. The Prime Minister spoke about that earlier, with the vast number of consultations we have had around the country with our frontline health professionals about improvements in our health, hospitals and aged-care sector—all areas in which the coalition cut funding when they were in government. The fact is that this government is committed to delivering more services for our older Australians, now and into the future. We are committed to building a modern health and hospital and aged-care system to meet the future challenges that we face.

Veterans

Mr MELHAM (3.26 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. Minister, how is the government improving service delivery to veterans?

Mr GRIFFIN—I thank the member for Banks for his question and I acknowledge his long-standing interest in the concerns of veterans within his electorate. Service delivery for our veterans community is a very important aspect of what any government has to do. A key aspect of that is the issue of processing their claims in a timely manner, ensuring that they get the support that they are entitled to when they are entitled to it, and ensuring that it is all done above board in a careful, caring and considerate manner. These were concerns which were raised with us in opposition. Under the previous government the circumstances were that in a number of areas there were blowouts in the times taken for the consideration of claims across a number of different areas. Upon entering government we took action. We set up an interdepartmental working group which has worked to deal with the issues between departments, particularly improving information sharing between departments. Also, we reduced the number of medical reviews some veterans needed to undertake. There have also been improvements around proof of identity requirements needed in certain circumstances.

We also established a special claims unit in December 2007 and it has worked hard within the department to work through those issues. The result of that has been a 20 per cent across-the-board improvement in the treatment of compensation claims, and a slight improvement for income support claims. In particular, under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act, in 2006-07 the average time for a claim to be considered was about 188 days. In 2008-09, it is down to 143 days—an improvement in the region of 25 per cent. For Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act claims, in 2006-07 it was some 234 days. Now, in 2008-09, it is down to 151—a 35 per cent reduction. The Veterans’ Entitlement Act is the largest area and historically deals with most of our claims. In 2006-07 the average time was 89 days; in 2008-09 it is down to 69 days—a 20 per cent plus reduction. All of this is good news for those who we care for within the veterans’ community; all of this is an important step towards improving the service provided.

The member for Maranoa recently raised some questions in the House which related to some of these matters, and I will be writing to him in the next few days with respect to those. I can tell him that his constituent only lodged his claim in the last couple of days. What I can also say though is some of the issues that were raised around the question of proof of identity requirements were, I think, going to the issue much further than they should have been in respect of what the real impacts were. The bottom line is the standard
approach operates within government, across government and in DVA it has been that way since 2004—that is, under the previous government yet again.

The circumstances are that we have to be careful because we do find instances of fraud, and I mentioned this in my answer recently with respect to this particular question. And I can also inform the House that over the past five years we have had some 20 cases of ID fraud which have been investigated and which, in fact, could have led to a situation of some hundreds of thousands of dollars being defrauded from the Commonwealth. There have been real improvements made here, real steps forward taken to ensure that we look after those who we care for within the veterans’ community, all things which we can be justifiably proud of in government.

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time

Mr Tuckey (3.30 pm)—Mr Speaker, I would like to say that, while I recognise your past decision that we do not revisit the relevance of proceedings during question time, I wish to raise for your consideration your future rulings on the relevance factor of standing order 104 as it applies outside this chamber to the Australian people. I use as an example the question today from the member for Farrer regarding the people who, for whatever fault or reason, are in queues awaiting access to public housing and, no doubt in light of a recent government agreement with certain parties, are anxious for information regarding any delays to their access to this housing that might result from that agreement. While I acknowledge the restraint upon yourself under standing order 104, I ask: would you, in such areas of direct public interest, consider applying your undoubtedly powers of fair play and persuasion to require ministers to provide an answer to those Australian people involved?

The Speaker—The member paraphrased that it is not my intention to revisit. Once again, my response is that if he is making a point, he has made the point. But I would just illustrate that if you look at practice, whether members like it or not, an occupant of the chair cannot dictate the way in which the question is answered.

Mr Tuckey—You’ve been pretty persuasive to me a couple of times, Mr Speaker!

The Speaker—I will allow that to go.

COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN Report

The Speaker—I present the report for 2008-09 on the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s activities in monitoring controlled operations conducted by the Australian Crime Commission, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

DOCUMENTS

Mr Albanese (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.33 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Government response to Ombudsman’s reports.

Tourism Australia—Report for 2008-09.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mine Action Strategy

Mr Stephen Smith (Perth—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (3.33 pm)—by leave—

Every five years nations now recommit themselves to tackling the scourge of land-
Australia is committed to a world free from landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. These weapons have contaminated more than 70 countries around the world and kill and maim at least 5,000 people a year. Australia has long supported action to eradicate landmines and other explosive remnants of war and to ease the suffering of adversely affected people and communities. Australia has a proud history of being at the forefront of international efforts on mine action. For more than a decade, our advocacy and leadership has demonstrated Australia’s international commitment.

In Oslo last December, I signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions on behalf of Australia. The convention is a significant humanitarian achievement, prohibiting cluster munitions that scatter battlefields with hundreds of explosive devices. Many of them fail to detonate and pose a long-term threat to civilians for years after hostilities have ceased.

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties recommended in August 2009 that Australia should ratify this convention. The government is proceeding with all the usual necessary consultative steps to complete ratification. It is certainly the government’s aspiration and intention to ratify as soon as possible.

In Cambodia, Australia’s work with the Australian Red Cross has helped more than 10,000 landmine survivors with prosthetics, wheelchairs, physiotherapy, livelihood training and support, and adequate health care, clean water and latrines. In Lebanon, clearance of unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster munitions, and safety training has
enabled safe access for humanitarian aid and promoted economic recovery. In Iraq, nearly nine million square metres of land has been cleared, and Australia’s work with the United Nations Development Program, the UNDP, has helped with the destruction of more than 60,000 explosive remnants of war, including abandoned artillery shells, mortars, grenades and ammunition. Clearing unexploded ordnance from schools has allowed nearly 2,500 pupils to return to their studies, while clearing unexploded ordnance from agricultural land allowed 1,500 farmers to open new vegetable and date farms. Australia can be proud that so many people’s lives have improved through these opportunities in education and employment.

Afghanistan is one of the most adversely mine-affected countries in the world and has one of the largest mine action programs. Australian support has helped establish a new community based de-mining project in Oruzgan province in the south of Afghanistan. Over 7,000 remnants of war have been removed to enable affected communities to again move freely and to cultivate their lands.

On Monday last week I visited Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been through a terrible conflict, a civil war lasting over 25 years where thousands of people were casualties and thousands of people were displaced. I announced when I was there a contribution by Australia of $6 million to assist in de-mining to ensure that the areas where people are resettled to are free from the terrible blight of landmines. This is vital work to enable communities to return to their homes, farmers to return to their fields, and children to return to school.

The international community will set further goals for landmine eradication at the second review conference of the mine ban convention in Colombia in two weeks time.

The Summit on a Mine-Free World will review progress made under the antipersonnel mine ban convention over the past decade. The summit will also look ahead to the next five years. Australia looks forward to participating in the summit. It is an important milestone in the life of the mine ban convention.

At the summit, the Australian delegation will be led by the Parliamentary Secretary for Overseas Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, and a member of the delegation will be the former member for Cowan, Graham Edwards, who has shown such bravery and courage in the course of his life, building a career following upon a terrible mine accident. At the summit Australia will renew its commitment to global efforts to reduce the impacts of landmines and other explosive remnants of war, which continue to threaten the lives of so many people.

Since meeting the $75 million commitment to mine action, the Australian government has been developing a strategy to build on our successful past efforts and guide future assistance. We have consulted widely with key partners, including governments and Australian and international non-government organisations. Australia will present our new Mine Action Strategy for the Australian aid program to the summit in two weeks time. The new strategy will support the achievement of Australia’s obligations under the mine ban convention, the convention on certain conventional weapons, in particular protocol V on explosive remnants of war, and future obligations under the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Under the strategy, Australia will pledge $100 million over the next five years on working towards a world free from landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. This is the largest five-year commitment made by Australia to mine action. It reinforces Australia’s ongoing com-
mitment to mine action and sees Australia at the forefront of international efforts on mine action. Australia’s assistance will support countries still affected by these weapons, including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos and Sri Lanka.

The strategy has one overriding goal—to reduce the threat and social and economic impact of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. To achieve this goal, Australia’s strategy will work towards the following four outcomes: Australia will seek to reduce deaths and injuries; Australia will improve the quality of life for victims and their affected families and communities; Australia will support and encourage affected countries to increase their ownership of national mine action efforts; and Australia will continue to advocate for universal adherence to key international instruments, such as the mine ban convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

For many developing countries, these explosive devices continue to hold back development. They bring devastating social and economic impacts to some of the poorest countries in the world, both during and after armed conflict. They adversely affect security and stability. They threaten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

I look forward to the outcomes of the Summit on a Mine-Free World. The summit’s outcomes will help guide implementation of Australia’s new strategy. Australia looks forward to working with our bilateral, regional and international partners to achieve a mine-free world. Our commitment will support Australia’s objectives to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development and contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We will build on the success of Australia’s leadership in mine action, reflecting Australia’s commitment to be a good international citizen.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Curtin to speak for 10 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Ms J. Bishop speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 10 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (3.44 pm)—The coalition welcomes the statement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs committing the government to the cause of ridding the world of landmines and unexploded remnants of war. Whenever the issue of landmines is raised, heartbreaking images of injured children immediately come to mind—children with limbs amputated and with other horrific injuries. Landmines do not discriminate between young people or older people and they have killed or maimed many adults among the thousands of casualties that still occur each year. However, it is hard not to be particularly devastated by the injuries to young children. It is disturbing to note that many antipersonnel mines are not designed to kill but to maim and cause horrific injuries. Landmines do not discriminate between young people or older people and they have killed or maimed many adults among the thousands of casualties that still occur each year. However, it is hard not to be particularly devastated by the injuries to young children. It is disturbing to note that many antipersonnel mines are not designed to kill but to maim and cause horrific injuries. One can only wonder at the motivation for developing and deploying such weapons in full knowledge they can lie for many years as a hidden danger to innocent civilians.

Another enduring image of the campaign against landmines was the January 1997 visit to Angola by the late Princess Diana. It now seems unbelievable, but her visit as an International Red Cross volunteer and her comments at the time sparked outrage in many parts of the world. And what caused the controversy? Princess Diana was calling for a ban on landmines. Given that the Ottawa treaty, known as the Mine Ban Convention, was signed in December 1997, Diana has been widely credited as playing a pivotal role
in the campaign against landmines, influencing governments to sign the treaty. The then British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, acknowledged her work during his second reading speech on the Landmines Bill 1998 in the House of Commons:

All Honourable Members will be aware from their postbags of the immense contribution made by Diana, Princess of Wales to bringing home to many of our constituents the human costs of landmines. The best way in which to record our appreciation of her work, and the work of NGOs that have campaigned against landmines, is to pass the Bill, and to pave the way towards a global ban on landmines.

I can clearly recall those images of Diana comforting injured children who had lost limbs to these terrible weapons and these images are seared in the minds of many around the world.

Under the previous coalition government, Australia took a leading role in furthering international action against mines. This started with the coalition government’s implementation of the Mine Ban Convention in 1998. Australia was in fact one of the original signatories to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. This was accompanied by $100 million over 10 years to support action on mines. The Mine Ban Convention was given effect in 1998 when the parliament passed appropriate laws, as required by article 9 of the convention. As part of our commitment to the convention, the Australian Defence Force destroyed Australia’s stockpile of antipersonnel landmines in the late 1990s, which was several years before the necessary deadline.

In July 2005, the coalition government committed a further $75 million over five years to support further action on mines. The coalition government supported the development of a mine action strategy to ensure the effectiveness of the additional funding. The coalition government also created in 1998 the position titled Australia’s Special Representative on Demining, which was part of the portfolio responsibilities of the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs. A current member of the coalition, my friend and colleague the member for Dunkley, once served in the role as Australia’s Special Representative on Mine Action and oversaw Australia’s commitments in nations such as Laos, Afghanistan, Burma, Iraq and Mozambique amongst many others. Australia’s Special Representative on Mine Action played an important role in ensuring the effective delivery of the government’s commitment to the various elements of mine action and to support more effective coordination of international donations. We continued to take a leading role on international mine action and implementation of the convention and in May 2006, then Foreign Minister Downer released an AusAID publication titled Australian aid: Mine action. Minister Downer reiterated the government’s commitment to eventually ridding the world of antipersonnel landmines and explosive remnants of war, which can remain a danger to people for many years after war has ceased.

While it is vital that strong pressure continues with respect to those countries that continue to stockpile and make these despicable weapons, some of the most valuable work that Australia has funded has been in clearing landmines and educating vulnerable people about the dangers that may lurk in their local environment. Valuable work has also been undertaken in rebuilding shattered lives and providing such things as prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs and associated health care. This must be an ongoing commitment because many people require support throughout their lives.

Millions of square metres of land have been cleared of mines, but many millions
more remain—a danger to human life and limb—and we must not rest until the world is
finally rid of this terrible menace. The coalition continues to endorse the work of the
Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, including its
efforts to ensure previous funding commitments are maintained and extended where
appropriate. For example, Australian government support in 2006-07 for mine action
included $3 million for Iraq, $7.4 million for Cambodia, $2.6 million for Afghanistan,
$2.9 million for Laos and $500,000 for Vietnam.

We strongly support the Labor government’s efforts in seeking a prompt ratification
of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This will expand international efforts to re-
duce the harmful impacts of explosives on civilians. It will also help promote the devel-
opment of those countries worst affected, many of which are in our region. The coal-
ition also welcomes the announcement today by the Labor government to extend Aus-
tralia’s five-year mine action funding for a further five years and to increase it from $75
million to $100 million.

We also commend the work of the Australian Network of the International Campaign
to Ban Landmines, which urges for a continuation of the innovative and successful
colition government funding commitments to mine action. This is an initiative we sup-
port strongly. The Australian Network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines
will also continue to have our support for its work in education and advocacy.

This is not only a human rights issue but also a security and international development
issue. Australia was part of the military forces which laid mines in Vietnam to pro-
tect military bases and we have a moral duty to continue our work to remove these devices
from the entire region.

I support the attendance of the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the Second Review
Conference of the Mine Ban Convention in Colombia in two weeks time. All Australians
look forward to the government’s release of its mine action strategy at that summit. We
encourage the minister to keep the House informed as to his strategy for Australian
support for the removal of these devices and survivor assistance. The government can be
assured it has the coalition’s bipartisan support on all efforts to eliminate these evil de-
vices and to help rehabilitate those already suffering from their deadly force.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Education

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE
Burke)—The Speaker has received a letter
from the honourable member for New Eng-
land proposing that a definite matter of pub-
lc importance be submitted to the House for
discussion, namely:

Improving educational pathways for country
Australians.

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

More than the number of members re-
quired by the standing orders having risen in
their places—

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (3.52
pm)—I thank members for endorsing what I
believe is a very significant motion before
the House, particularly for those of us who
reside in country Australia. At the outset, I
state that I would like to see this debate take
place in a constructive sense as to the sorts of
things that can happen in pathways to im-
prove education in country areas. There are
some issues out there at the moment and
some of those have been talked about today.
I believe there are an enormous number of
positive things that can occur into the future,
not least of which is a modern broadband
network across regional Australia that may well have enormous implications for not only education but also other aspects of country life.

There will be a number of issues discussed today, but I intend to use most of my time to talk about one initiative that started at the University of New England, which is in my electorate. It was put together by the National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia. As I said, it is based at the University of New England. It is headed by Professor John Pegg, who is ably assisted by Associate Professor Lorraine Graham. I believe the program that I refer to has enormous potential for students at our primary schools—the sorts of students we all know of—who are starting to lag behind in their achievement levels. We have all seen it in the past and we are seeing it now. For students who start to lag behind in achievement levels, their confidence levels, belief in themselves and self-esteem drop off exponentially over time if neglected. When I was at school, they were the kids who were sent outside to mow the lawn and we just assumed that they would drift through life and find a way of their own. We have always struggled to find programs that can bring those young people back to the fold, in a sense, when they get behind and take them forward in their achievement.

I believe the program that I refer to today is probably the only program where there is empirical evidence that we have something that is working. It is called the QuickSmart program. It has been used to improve literacy and numeracy since 2001. It was set up at the University of New England. It has been in use across most of the states and territories, including the Northern Territory. I will refer to some evidence in relation to the Northern Territory in a minute, particularly in terms of Aboriginal children. It has been used with enormous success. This year there will be something like 200 schools across Australia using the QuickSmart program. It is about helping those kids who might be three or four years behind in their literacy or numeracy. They might be 10, 11 or 12 years old. It is a 30-week interventionist program where the children are taken out of the classroom for a period of time—I think it is three times a week—and given specialist teaching. It is a reasonably expensive program—not very expensive—but, given the outcomes of this program, it is very cheap. One of the reasons for raising it today is to make sure that the government is well aware of this program and looks to the future with the evidence coming out of this.

The University of New England is monitoring the progress of the students. In some cases, some of the programs used are good while the child is on the program and then there may well be a drop-off in the pathway that the child is achieving at school. Part of the research that the University of New England is doing is to not only develop the program in the first place but also follow it, question it and evaluate it against other comparisons from the various state and territory departments of education. On all levels there is tremendous achievement occurring through this particular program. The rate at which some of these children are improving, not only during the program but two, three, four or five years on, has been determined at QuickSmart. So they have been not only able to bring some of these kids forward three or four years but also able to maintain that push, so that children who would have left school at an early age, disappointed and assuming they are failures in academic ability, are lifted and then push themselves forward. With the research that has been done by following those students through the program and through their progress long after the pro-
gram is finished, the empirical evidence indicates that those children are maintaining that pathway.

Whenever I talk to schools, school principals or teachers who are involved with this program, they all say that it works and that they have never seen anything like it: the way in which it works, the way in which it lifts the children and the way in which the children enjoy the process. Obviously, they are building their own confidence levels as the process goes on. I will reflect on a couple of examples at this point. I have a quote from one student:

When I am in QuickSmart I really feel smart—like I am not dumb any more. When I wasn’t doing QuickSmart I felt dumb. I didn’t really know how to do maths but it helped me in a lot of ways, like how to do problems and teaching me all my times tables. If it wasn’t for QuickSmart I don’t know where I would be right now. I love QuickSmart.

I have watched videos of the students being taught and you can see the interaction and the way in which the confidence and academic levels build over a period of time. A parent says:

QuickSmart has had a huge effect on our daughter’s performance at school—most notably the Basic Skills results. In Year 3 she was in the bottom 30% of the state. This year, in Year 5, she was in the top 30%. She is able to complete homework tasks without much assistance. She was already confident and capable with all other areas of the curriculum but was not confident with maths. Her confidence has increased considerably.

Another recommendation is from Peter Westwood, an emeritus academic at Flinders University and the University of Hong Kong. He says:

QuickSmart is clearly one of the few (possibly the only) intervention programs implemented in Australia to have been subjected to such rigorous and thoughtful evaluation over a period of almost nine years and across diverse settings. As such, it certainly merits the description of an evidence-based approach.

A research document on QuickSmart produced in the Northern Territory says:

In the Northern Territory, data collected over the past three years indicates that schools can expect on average a 10% improvement on standardised test results of QuickSmart students in the first year of implementation and that jumps to approximately 20% improvement in the second and subsequent years of implementation.

I know the member for Page has been very supportive of this program and has been working with it in her electorate for some years. Over the last five years in the Lismore diocese, the results of QuickSmart students in the state-wide basic skills tests improved substantially. With numeracy assessments, 92 per cent of students improved by at least one band and 40 per cent of students improved by at least two bands. I think that gives an indication of the empirical evidence that this research is starting to show. Forty-two of the 44 Orara High School students, at Coffs Harbour, who undertook the QuickSmart program in 2006 were above benchmark on the 2008 national NAPLAN test in year 9. The two students who performed below benchmark were diagnosed as IM students in year 7. Each of these students, however, managed above-average growth for the period 2006-08.

Interestingly enough, the principal of that school was so enthusiastic about the program that he put 44 students on it to bring them forward—not the top students, but students who were behind. The next year the school lost its disadvantaged schools money because it had lifted its results. It makes me wonder what we are trying to achieve with some of the programs we have put in place.

QuickSmart has received many awards: the American Educational Research Association Award, the Learning Difficulties Australia Tertiary Student Award and the Vice-
Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Research. I will not go through them all, but anybody who is interested in this particular program should look very seriously at it. In the year ahead I think something like 200 schools will be participating in the QuickSmart program.

The people at the university whose brainchild this has been, John Pegg and Lorraine Graham, have done an extraordinary job in promoting this program—a lot of it in their private time. This is not about money-making for them as individuals or for the university. It is about putting in place a program that actually delivers. If we are serious about eradicating a degree of delinquency in our children, if we are serious about doing something about closing the gap for Aboriginal kids and if we are serious about really bringing people forward so that they can achieve academically at universities later on et cetera, we have to look at these sorts of programs. Even though this does take time and money, I would urge all members to find out where this program is working within their electorates—city or country—and have a look at the program and the way it is being conducted, and the results. Go and talk to the principals that are conducting this. I know the principals in my area, from every school that the program goes to, just cannot believe the results they are getting with kids that they would have once sent out to mow the lawn. They just cannot believe the results they are getting.

I thank the minister as well, because I spoke with her earlier about the QuickSmart program and I have had meetings with some of her senior people in the past about the program. I know the minister is at an important meeting with the Prime Minister at the moment but I thank her for her for giving her attention to the program. One of the things I would like the minister to look at closely, though, is the situation in relation to TAFE. There is a lot of talk in this place about skills development and education in terms of the competition between private providers and TAFE. I know people have different philosophical views in relation to that but in country locations there are areas where, if TAFE is weakened much more by the private providers coming in and then moving out, we will run the risk of having quite large areas that may not be serviced in respect of the skills that we are all saying we need out there—particularly when the economic recovery comes on.

The youth allowance has been debated at length and I have supported the government on the amendments, but there are still some issues there. I would like the minister to clarify, publicly, the 90-minute distance test for country students being able to get to a university, because I think it is not well enough known in the community. It means that most students who do not live near a university will be able to apply for some form of youth allowance through the income test if they cannot get to a university within 90 minutes.

In conclusion, I congratulate one of the great organisations of rural and regional areas—the Isolated Children’s Parents Association. I think they are an extraordinary group of people who represent their constituency in a very great way and when they come to Canberra I think everybody from the Prime Minister down knows that they are very serious about these issues. (Time expired)
I have a confession to make: I am a city boy. But in the last few months I have spent quite a bit of time in country Australia. I have been travelling with Lindsay Fox and Bill Kelty as part of the Keep Australia Working program in 20 of the government’s employment priority areas around Australia. Twelve of those are outside the major cities of Australia, everywhere from Cairns to Tasmania. Some of these areas, like Port Augusta and Whyalla, have high levels of manufacturing and they have been hit hard. Some are very reliant on other industries. Cairns, for example, has a very high reliance on construction, mining and overseas tourism. As a result it has been hit very hard.

But the common thread across all of these priority areas—city, regional and rural—is a low level of education attainment. It shows a direct link between unemployment and levels of education attainment, particularly in the bush, where rates of education are more often than not lower than in metropolitan areas. Areas of the member for New England’s electorate are in the Richmond-Tweed and also in the Clarence Valley employment priority region—towns like Tenterfield and Glen Innes. In these areas you find only 34 per cent of the priority region’s working age population has finished high school. Across Australia the average rate is 46.5 per cent. Only 11.4 per cent of people have obtained a bachelor’s degree or above. Compare this with the rest of Australia, which is 17.4 per cent.

The member for New England is right when he says that areas like the one he represents face greater challenges than other parts of Australia, so I was interested to hear what he had to say about the QuickSmart program this afternoon. I can relate to this. One of the first things I did when I became a local member was visit my old primary school, Cabramatta Public School. I spoke to the principal about the children who were there and the challenges they were facing. He told me that, of the whole group of children who had started kindergarten that year, 80 per cent came to school not being able to speak English or had very great difficulties writing English and even spelling their own names. But within three years, because of the programs running at that school, when they sat the basic skills test in third grade they were equalling or exceeding the state average. That is the power of education and of good programs that are targeted at young people who need extra help with literacy and numeracy. I think there is something similar happening in New England, judging by the contribution the member for New England made today.

The member for New England raised the issue of continued funding for the QuickSmart program, developed in his electorate at the University of New England. This program aims to boost numeracy outcomes for students through intensive interventions with students and teachers. As the member has noted, QuickSmart has produced some outstanding results for the children falling behind who participated in the program. I know the member for New England has been a strong advocate of this program for a very long time. He has been banging on the door of government in support of what he tells us is a very worthwhile program—because that is what good local members of parliament do. I can inform the member that I had a discussion with the Deputy Prime Minister about this program this afternoon, and I know he has also been in regular contact with her office. We both agree that the program is certainly worthy of further consideration and we will look very carefully at what further support the Rudd government can provide to this program into the future. Currently the government is funding the program through the literacy and numeracy pilot to the tune of $832,000. Through this pro-
gram, I understand QuickSmart is being trialled in 13 schools in Lismore and Armidale. It involves around 156 participant students and 75 comparison students. Results of the pilot will be available in December 2010.

The program was also provided with funding of $1.5 million as a ‘closing the gap’ measure for Indigenous literacy and numeracy. In addition to this direct support, the Australian government is investing $540 million to support literacy and numeracy reform through the Smarter Schools national partnership for literacy and numeracy. Through this partnership, state based education authorities are responsible for selecting and implementing interventions and reforms in their school systems. I am happy to advise that several states and territories have indicated that they are considering rolling out QuickSmart to their schools as part of the national partnership for literacy and numeracy.

This is one of a number of programs that we are rolling out in regional Australia—programs built specifically to support the education of children living in regional areas and the schools in which they study. An example is Drought Assistance for Schools. The Drought Assistance for Schools program is a big part of the government’s $715 million package of drought assistance for farmers, small businesses and communities in regional Australia. The funding can be used to subsidise excursions or extracurricular activities for whole classes or an entire school which may be cost prohibitive for families doing it tough as a result of the drought. Principals can also choose to direct some of this funding directly to families in need. Up to $10,000 is available each year for rural and remote schools located in towns with populations of fewer than 100,000 in exceptional circumstances declared areas. In 2007-08, more than $22 million was delivered to 3,030 government and non-government schools across Australia. A similar amount was available last financial year and I understand that program has been extended until 30 June 2010.

The Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme helps primary, secondary and some tertiary students to access education when they are unable to attend a local government school. It provides families with a number of allowances which they can use to meet additional costs they incur when they need to either send a student away from home or undertake distance education. Last year, this program helped 11,212 young people from rural and isolated schools at a total cost of $60.7 million.

The Country Areas Program is provided to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for students who are disadvantaged by their geographical isolation. In 2008 this program provided $30.5 million to government, Catholic and independent schools in all Australian states and the Northern Territory. This year Country Areas Program funding for government schools has been incorporated into the National Education Agreement. Country Areas Program funding for all Catholic and independent schools is covered in the Schools Assistance Act 2008. Country Areas Program funds are provided in recognition of the higher costs of delivering education services in regional and remote areas. Funds are distributed on the basis of the number of remote and isolated students attending a rural or remote school.

In the area of training, the declared drought area incentive helps primary producers who hold an exceptional circumstances certificate to continue to offer apprenticeships and traineeships to people living in a drought declared area. Eligible employers can apply for up to $1,500 as a declared drought area commencement incentive and a $1,500 completion incentive for apprentices.
and trainees who meet the eligibility criteria. This is in addition to other incentives available to employers who take on an apprentice, including the new program that the government has recently announced called Apprentice Kickstart.

As I was travelling around the country with Bill Kelty and Lindsay Fox as part of the program, as I mentioned earlier—and I know there are also members in the House who have participated in that program—one of the things that employers told us everywhere we travelled was that they needed more support to put apprentices on, particularly in regional Australia, at the present time because of the pressures imposed upon them by the global recession. I checked the evidence, and they were right. There has been a drop over the course of the last 12 months of 20 per cent in the number of apprentices that have been put on around the country—a drop of 10,000. And when I looked at what happened in the nineties I saw an eerie resemblance to what had happened then: the recession hit and a big drop in the number of young people taken on as apprentices—a drop of something like 35 per cent from 1990 to 1991. But what surprised me was that we did not recover and return to the same number of apprentices starting until 2004. So it took 13 years between 1991 and 2004 until we started recruiting and training the same number of apprentices as we had before the last recession. It created a skills crisis. It created a bigger problem for Australia than we needed to have. That is why we have implemented Apprentice Kickstart, which is tripling the upfront bonus to employers to employ up to 21,000 apprentices this summer in traditional trades—butchers, bakers, electricians, plumbers, pastrycooks and hairdressers. It is designed to tackle what is a real and emerging problem, one that is as real in metropolitan areas as it is in rural and regional Australia.

For young people from regional areas going to university, regional universities are supported by a regional loading to boost the Commonwealth assistance these campuses receive. Per capita funding is provided for rural and remote non-government school students in further recognition of additional education costs. A remoteness loading is calculated as an additional percentage above their per capita general recurrent grant funding for students studying at eligible locations. The Commonwealth has a big role to play here supporting students while they study with payments like youth allowance. In the last 24 hours this support, unfortunately, has been threatened by the reckless actions of the opposition in the Senate. The biggest risk to educational pathways for country kids today is the insistence of the Liberal and National parties on blocking our income support reforms in the Senate. After 12 years of coalition neglect of the current system, student income support is fragmented. It has failed to deliver support to those who need it most: students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from rural and regional Australia. While the coalition claim that their opposition to the bill that is now back in the Senate is because they want to help regional students, the reality is that in the last five years of coalition government the number of students from the bush going to university has actually fallen—it has gone down. Our reforms would see more students receiving support, a massive expansion of scholarships—more than 28 times the number of education costs scholarships provided than when we took office in 2007—and would ensure that the money goes to those who need it most.

Last night the coalition stood shoulder to shoulder to rip off 150,000 students, including many young people from rural Australia. They did this by tacking amendments onto our legislation which would blow a $1 bil-
lion hole in the budget, effectively blocking the legislation. They did this because they want to see students from families with incomes of around $300,000 a year continue to get youth allowance. That is the impact of their amendments. The coalition cannot expect to criticise the government about debt and deficit on the one hand and then ask us to take this kind of hit to the budget on the other.

Blocking the legislation will directly affect thousands of families who will, as a result, continue to struggle to send their children to university. We know that, statistically, rural and regional families tend to have lower household incomes. As a result of the bill being blocked, almost 25,000 families with incomes between $32,000 and $44,000 will miss out on an increase in their support to the maximum rate. A further 78,000 who would have received a higher part-payment or who would have received youth allowance as a dependant for the first time will now miss out. If the legislation that is now in the Senate is effectively blocked, there will be no new relocation scholarships for students who need to move to study. In fact, there will be no new scholarships for students at all next year, excluding Indigenous scholarships.

As a result, the entire university sector has now lined up against the coalition, whether it is Ian Chubb, Vice-Chancellor of ANU, and the members of the GO8 or Ross Milbourne, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology Sydney and the Chair of the Australian Technology Network of Universities, or Paul Johnson, the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University and member of the Innovative Research Universities Australia, or David Barrow, the head of the National Union of Students. They all say the same thing. The entire sector has now lined up against the coalition.

The Rudd government recognises the importance of ensuring that young people from rural Australia have access to the best possible education. We know that rural and regional students and their families have special educational needs and that there are particular barriers to their effective participation in education. The member for New England has made that clear in his contribution to this matter of public importance. This government’s record is one of investing in rural and regional education, and we are not going to let that be stopped by the coalition’s irresponsibility in the Senate.

Education is the key not just to a fair society but also to the future of our economy. Early learning projects and literacy and numeracy projects like QuickSmart, apprenticeship projects like Kickstart, environmental skills and work experience programs like the National Green Jobs Corps—which is currently being debated in this place—and the reform of youth allowance that is now in the Senate are all part of making sure young people get a good education and that more people from country Australia go to university. It is all part of Building the Education Revolution, because the education revolution is not just about building infrastructure but about building skills.

Mr Oakeshott (Lyne) (4.22 pm)—I also rise to strongly endorse this matter of public importance from the member for New England on improving educational pathways for country Australians. I will certainly be one of many members who, quick smart, will be getting to know more about the QuickSmart program. It does sound like it is doing some tremendous work in other areas around the mid-North Coast. If it is as good as the member for New England and the government say it is, then I as a local member will be chasing that program for my community.
I also want to endorse the comments of the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment, who has just spoken in this debate. The mid-North Coast of New South Wales is a priority area. The parliamentary secretary has visited the area with Bill Kelty and we now have a local employment coordinator and are in the process of putting together a local plan. That is assisting in some challenging times. But without doubt, in my view and in the view of many in our region, none of it really matters unless we tackle head-on the issue of the significantly lower than average education figures. Whether it is in relation to completions of year 12 and retention rates, or the frustratingly low tertiary education and university attendance, or just the general culture around the aspiration for education on the mid-North Coast, we have some huge challenges. Our lower than average wages, our higher than average unemployment, some of the lowest participation rates in the country: none of those are going to be cracked unless the meal ticket and the aspiration for education are grabbed by our region and supported by the government for our region. That is why this motion today is important.

I received just in the last couple of days a document from DEEWR about a whole range of issues, but they have put in a couple of paragraphs about the mid-North Coast of New South Wales. It is the first time I have seen a summary from a government department about the issues in our area, so I am pleased to see it, as gloomy as it might be. Hopefully, it does send a message to everyone here, to those involved in government policy making who are listening and to those in the community who are listening that we do have some real and substantial challenges in the area of education, so I will quote what it says:

The Mid-North Coast has been one of the most persistently disadvantaged regions in Australia in recent decades and continues to experience high levels of disadvantage. Indeed, a high proportion of the region’s working age population is on income support, while the region’s participation rate of 49.2 per cent in September 2009 remains well below the comparable rate for Australia of 65.1 per cent.

The region’s reliance on at-risk industries, particularly retail trade when the impact of the cash payments begins to recede, and well below average levels of educational attainment suggest that not only is the region currently disadvantaged but may also deteriorate further as the impact of the GFC deepens.

I can report back to the House that at this stage that further deterioration is not happening. There is enormous resilience in the mid-North Coast market. But, given the comment about educational attainment, if in the long term we are going to creep out of being comparatively disadvantaged on all the relevant indicators then we do need the support of government in building the culture for education and opening up the pathways to allow that culture to develop. So the program that the member for New England talked about is an important one.

I want to talk about access to university from an area that, as I say, already has comparative disadvantage and does not have a bricks-and-mortar university campus. We are told that students can, if they want to, stay at home and do any course in Australia, with most universities now providing distance education options for most degrees. The reality is that the uptake is not happening as I think all of us would like. Bricks and mortar to some degree do matter. I spoke to one university last week, the University of Sydney, about the issues of access and pathways to try to get my head around why regional and rural students are not represented as well as they should be in the courses. It was an interesting and somewhat alarming discussion. One of the comments was that to get access to do a law degree this year it looks like the minimum cut-off will be 99.7.
Unless you are wrapped in cotton wool in an aspirational family environment for education, where you have it drummed into you every day that you are going to go to university, that is out of the reach of most students, particularly those who are grappling with a whole lot of other issues in their lives. The Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, who is in the House at the moment, has just delivered an excellent report on the issue of work and the impacts on students’ lives. That is very much a live issue in regional and rural areas, whether because of family structure or income levels. I defy anyone in this place to say that someone who is getting through year 12 in a difficult, sometimes abusive situation in a poor area of the mid-North Coast, for example, is a lesser person who deserves less opportunities than a person on the North Shore of Sydney who is wrapped in cotton wool and has a family making sure they study 24/7 to get the mark.

The opportunities for tertiary access need to be opened to all by the government. The very good targets that have already been announced by government—one is that by 2025, 40 per cent of I think over 25-year-olds will have a higher education qualification—are wonderful targets to aspire to. But we are not going to get anywhere near them unless there is a real loading for and a real focus on regional areas such as the mid-North Coast. Our rate of university attendance is one in six. We have a long way to go to get to that 40 per cent mark and to do our bit to contribute to that national target. It is a two-way street. The message today is very much for the homes of the mid-North Coast to be aspirational about education. The evidence is clear: the previous speaker mentioned the evidence about length of stay in education and the opportunities that creates. It is sometimes difficult to get that conversation going in households where there has not been a tradition of education. The comment is often, ‘I went to the university of life. I don’t need to go to university.’ Those are the sorts of challenges faced by a young student who may want to leave that home and go to university. They need to be supported by government if we are going to be serious about these targets.

The other target, of 20 per cent from low socioeconomic areas, relates directly to the mid-North Coast. At the moment, we are a long way short of attaining that target, based on the current settings. The one good thing that has come out of the youth allowance debate over the last 24 hours is the review. None of us likes reviews too much but it is the first sign that we are going to get serious about addressing the inequality in the challenges and access blocks for regional and rural students accessing tertiary education. I hope that review happens soon and not at the cut-off date, which is the middle of June 2012. I hope it happens sometime within the next 12 months, that it has eminence, that it has the resourcing to make it a cracking document and that any recommendations that come from it are taken seriously by the executive and acted upon as a next round of reform for education policy. Then we might actually achieve some of these lovely targets that we have had set and that we all want to attain. But at this stage I have to question whether we are going to achieve them on the current settings.

I hope at some point, whether it be through demand-based funding for universities on the near horizon or further government reform, that we can consider the individual who comes from an area of low socioeconomic background who gets a lower mark than someone who has come from an area of advantage and somehow allow that person to have access to university at an equivalent level. I think the issue of UAI thresholds being locked in stone as the only
indicator for entry to university is a serious access block for those who might get 10 or 15 per cent less, but the challenges they have faced to get within 10 or 15 per cent are worth far more than 10 or 15 per cent in the overall equation. I endorse this MPI and ask the government to really focus hard on rural and regional students as a group and to treat them as a group. *(Time expired)*

**Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (4.33 pm)*—It is a great pleasure to endorse this MPI put forward by the member for New England. The member for New England outlined a particularly fabulous initiative at the University of New England, the QuickSmart program. I was pleased to hear the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment indicate that the government will be looking very closely at that. He is spot on when he says that literacy and numeracy ability from preschool, not just school, is a critically important indicator of how well our young people will do throughout their education. For those who have the added burden to carry—although sometimes it can be a joy—of distance or remoteness or disability or language which means that they have a little bit less of a head start in life, it is important that we intervene with such programs. It is good to see our university sector doing more than its core business and actually getting out and being a driver for community and economic development in our regions.

On that point I want to give a bit of a pump to my own University of Wollongong and to inform the House that the University of Wollongong has a Graduate School of Medicine. This Graduate School of Medicine was established specifically to service regional, rural and remote Australian students. It is an attempt to address the shortage of doctors in rural and remote areas. It is a really good initiative by the University of Wollongong, which decided in setting up a medical school that they did not want it to be the classic sandstone university medical school. They wanted it to be one that would provide GPs to rural and regional Australia. It would take the students from rural and regional Australia, support them through university and have them linked to do their professional practice back with hospitals, GPs and primary health care providers in their regions. While they are studying they are engaged in their learning and practice back in the regions that we hope they will return to. One of the big challenges for rural and regional areas is getting those sorts of professionals who are so desperately important to communities to come back. Indeed the Illawarra region experiences this in areas like the Shoalhaven, which struggles with a similar sort of demographic to that which the member for Lyne was describing. Sometimes we get over the hump of getting those young people into the courses and then lose them to the city, which is not what we want. This Graduate School of Medicine has been set up specifically to assist young people to continue to network and engage with their home town or the region of their home town and to have a commitment to go back and work in it.

I was interested that the member for New England mentioned the National Broadband Network in passing as an important aspect of education. One of the things they have done is set up a very high-tech lecture theatre—which I toured with our minister for health—where every student is set up like us in this chamber: they all have microphones and they all have cameras on them. There is a classroom at the main base, at the Wollongong campus, and then there is another one at the Shoalhaven campus. So students from the Shoalhaven enrolled in the medical school do not have to travel every day up to the Wollongong campus; they can go and sit in this lecture room, watch the lecturer, watch the demonstrations. They can press a button
when they want to talk and ask questions, and the lecturer actually turns to a part of the room where they are indicated. So it is completely interactive. It is quite amazing to see what technology can do in terms of getting that learning out of the centres to regional and more remote campuses. Perhaps I should invite the member for Lyne to come to Wollongong and talk to the University of Wollongong about setting up a satellite campus in his area and using some of this technology.

Of course, that technology does rely very heavily on having good-quality broadband rolled out across the nation. People say to me, ‘The Broadband Network—surely that’s just about surfing the net and game playing; it’s all a bit irrelevant to the realities of life.’ But it is not. It is going to be a critical factor in driving both economic and community development across Australia. Developing a national broadband network is as important as when we built the road and rail links to our rural and regional areas. And I think it is going to be particularly significant for educational opportunities.

The parliamentary secretary talked about visiting classrooms, as we all do. Some of the things we see now are those interactive whiteboards rolling out, young people with laptops—

Mr Sidebottom—Chalk!

Ms BIRD—Chalk and talk! The old style teacher joins me here in the person of the member for Braddon. I am sure if he was chalking and talking the students would be fascinated! Yes, a mark for three from the member for New England for that interjection. However, this generation will face a much more complex world, and those technologies are reinvigorating classrooms and re-engaging young people. I am very passionate about the fact that schools with top-class music programs and top-class multimedia subjects are actually engaging a lot of the formerly disengaged young people.

I too visited an old alma mater. I was invited to my old high school, Airds High School. It is in the member for Macarthur’s electorate. It was a tough school with a tough population to service but it had a tremendously dedicated staff. They have won many awards. They have a very high Maori population and they have engaged those young people through music. To me it seems like a really logical thing to do and it has significantly improved levels of engagement and retention. So I think a lot of the things that both the previous speakers identified are very important in terms of engaging with our young people.

I have spoken to a lot of rural and regional young people when travelling around with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training—which the member for Lyne is also on—and I know that a lot of them connect to the outer world through technology, through the web. They seek connections and form friendships and groups in that way. The National Broadband Network will be really important in that it will give them educational opportunities as well—and, more broadly, medical services and better delivery of government services. I am sure we are slowly getting there, with things like online claiming from government departments. It is a slow and painful process but something we need to be doing.

I just wanted to acknowledge the University of Wollongong’s role in that. I think that Wollongong and the University of New England being regional universities means they are really committed to expanding and to engaging those young people to create professionals—teachers, lawyers, doctors and nurses—who stay and work in our rural and regional areas.
In the few minutes left to me to speak I want to heartily endorse the member for New England’s endorsement of TAFE. I have no bias, being a former TAFE teacher! I think the Australian TAFE sector provides world-class education. Young people who graduate from TAFE and go overseas to work get snapped up, and other countries do not want to let them go. We have a tremendously successful TAFE sector across all states, despite the slight variations between them, and TAFE has a presence in just about every rural and regional community. It is a lot like the public school; the public TAFE is a very common presence and a really well regarded one. I heartily endorse the member for New England’s comments on the importance it plays as a pathway for young people in rural and regional areas.

I also want to acknowledge that the member for Lyne talked about the issue of aspiration. I think that is a really important contribution. I am the first person in my family to have gone to university. I come from a long line of coalminers and women who did not get an education or work. It was interesting in my early political activity to have a lot of people say to me, ‘We don’t want one of you university people representing us in a working-class type area.’ They said it less politely than that, but you get the general idea! And I always said to them, ‘The great aspiration of the working class was to get their children a university education and get them out of the coalmine or out of the steelworks or wherever it was,’ and to some extent I think my generation and I are a reflection of that. My mum left school and worked at a cake shop until she met Dad. She was an amazing woman who could have gone a long way in her life with the support of education. My dad went and did an apprenticeship and did very, very well, and I do not think he ever regretted it. But he is also someone who would have done extremely well with a university education. As I said, I was the first in my family to do that—and there was a culture of the working class aspiring to better education for their children.

I think you are right, Member for Lyne; to some extent we have lost that a bit. It is important to value all forms of education. We are all great advocates of that, whether it is vocational education or academic education. But the aspiration needs to be there. Let us not talk down schools. Let us not talk down education. Let us not talk down the teaching professions. (Time expired)

Mr Chester (Gippsland) (4.43 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the motion moved as a matter of public importance by the member for New England and I commend him for raising this issue. I also commend other members for their contributions to the debate so far. I think the maturity of the debate reflects very positively on the House. I note that also present in the chamber is one of the great champions of regional students in the member for Cowper, as well as the member for Braddon—I read his speech on the youth allowance issue very closely and I congratulate him on his contribution in that regard. I think what this debate today points out is that there are champions on both sides of the House when it comes to education, and I congratulate the Independents as well in that regard.

That is why I have been disappointed that in the last couple of months the debate over student income support in relation to youth allowance has descended somewhat into some fairly vitriolic attacks, which were typified a bit today by the minister for education’s approach. I think the chamber is above that in the sense that I believe there is a great deal of support on both sides of the House for measures to improve the opportunities of education for students, particularly those from rural and regional areas. I do not deny
for a second that the previous government could have done more, but it is also ridiculous to suggest that any government would do nothing in relation to education. This is a shared responsibility between students, parents, teachers and the state and federal governments. So I think the motion put before the House today has provided an opportunity for some cooler heads to prevail, and I congratulate the member in that regard.

Quite clearly, in representing our regional electorates we are very much aware that parents, students and teachers are very keen for us to come here and advocate on behalf of our communities to get the best possible opportunity for our students and to do everything we can to make sure they get a fair go. We can point to a number of issues—the member for Lyne referred to a few in his electorate and certainly there are some in the Gippsland electorate. For example, the year 12 education retention rates are appalling. I am not going to stand here and blame state governments or previous governments or whatever else. It is a simple fact of life that we need to do better, and it should not be this hard to get a fair go for country students.

So I accept that part of the problem is the economic barrier. But as has also been touched on by other speakers, the aspirational barrier is a real concern for us in rural and regional areas. Like many other members, I speak to students in schools right across the electorate of Gippsland and I tell them that in terms of the economic barriers and student income support I will come to parliament and do my best for them in that regard. In terms of the aspirational barrier, they have got to be the ones who look within themselves and decide how they are going to achieve their absolute best in terms of their future achievements in life. I tell them that whether it be as bobcat driver, just be the best bobcat driver in Gippsland; whether it is going to be as a builder, then go along and do the apprenticeship and there is nothing wrong with that decision either; but if they want to aspire to go to university then it is up to us to try to help them with those economic barriers.

From a social justice perspective, it is a question of equity—and I think that we appreciate that on both sides of the House—and for those who are a bit more hard-nosed, the economic-minded ones perhaps in the House, there is also a question of productivity for us. Helping children from rural and regional areas achieve their full potential gives us the skills we need for future generations. There is no question that the skill base shortage that we face in rural and regional Australia is best addressed by bringing up our own children and giving them the opportunity to achieve their full potential and achieve their training in trades or whatever it might be, or in university qualifications.

I throw into the debate in the limited time I have available the point that I am not sure how much longer Australia can continue to import skilled professionals from overseas. I think the social licence, for example, in taking medical professionals from the less privileged countries than ours is just about worn out. Those doctors are actually needed in their home countries and I am not sure that Australia can continue to do that without doing everything in its power to train our own doctors and to provide our young people in rural areas with every opportunity to fill the huge gap in rural and regional health provision. I make those opening comments—and I am getting very close to making my closing comments—and I am sure that it is a topic that will come before the House in the very near future.

In the limited time that is available to me I refer to the student income support and the lecture we have been receiving in terms of what is a fair go for country students looking
forward. There has been much made now of the amendments which were passed in the Senate, and I acknowledge that members of the Liberal and National parties, and the Greens, and I think Family First, supported those amendments. That would suggest to me that the minister must realise that there is actually a bit of a problem with the retrospective nature of the changes that she is proposing. That is why there is such frustration within parliament and in the broader community. I urge the minister to sit down with those who have their concerns and in a mature way see if we can work through this. Right now we have students finishing their VCE or HSC exams and they need certainty. 

(Time expired)

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (4.48 pm)—The member for Gippsland’s speech was almost so agreeable I am tempted to yield my time on the floor to him. I do thank the member for New England for bringing this MPI to the chamber. As other members have remarked, his MPIs always lift the level of debate in this chamber away from partisan bickering towards bipartisan agreement, which is always a good thing. It does disturb me, however, that he has scorecards, so I hope I pass the test.

It is great to see a local member—and I got an eight!—from the country with an independent spirit bringing forward a program like QuickSmart for government attention. I think that it is terribly important, and I note particularly the remarks that the member for New England about self-esteem. Self-esteem and the way children feel about their education is almost as important as their inherent intelligence and their grades. If you read books like Emotional Intelligence by a person named Goldstein, there have been a number of tests run in the United States which basically prove that test scores dive once children’s self-esteem is shattered. So it is a terribly important debate that we have here and one that I think we all agree with and will find little partisan bickering to interfere with it.

In the short time I have I want to talk little bit about some of the government’s programs and the local approaches. I want to relate three government programs to three of the country towns in my electorate, including my old home town of Kapunda where I went to high school and from which I commuted to university as an 18-year-old. The programs are Computers in Schools, science and language centres, and the Drought Assistance for Schools program. I think that what these three towns prove is that the national program the government has put in place has a disproportionately positive effect in country towns, that it helps country towns far more than it would help the city even though the benefits are great in the city as well.

In terms of the first round for Computers in Schools, two country high schools—two out of six schools in the first round—Clare High School and Riverton High School, received computers. There were 110 computers to Clare High School and 73 to Riverton. In round 2, of the 13 schools six were from the country including my old high school of Kapunda—which was Sir Sidney Kidman’s old home—which received 93 computers. So you can see that that there is a disproportionate effect in country towns.

The same is true of science and language centres. My electorate received 13 science and language centres for high schools across the electorate. They include Clare, getting $1.8 million for a new science lab—and particularly important in Clare given it is one of the greatest wine producing regions in the country—and $1.2 million for Riverton high school. In Riverton they nearly did not put the application in. They were so surprised when they won it. They got $1.2 million for a language centre and it is the biggest thing
that has happened to that high school in quite some time. Unfortunately, my old high school at Kapunda already had a new science lab provided by the Rann government and that is a good thing.

In terms of the Drought Assistance for Schools program, it is a particularly important program because drought does attack a community’s foundations—it rips the guts out of a community and tends to overshadow everything. We know it has an impact on school communities. Nothing would affect a child’s self-esteem like being excluded from a school excursion or not being able to get textbooks because the child’s family was in a business or on a farm that was affected by drought. So this is a particularly important program. We have allocated money for schools—$715 million—and we have given discretion to the schools to allow them to make decisions about whether they help individual families or whether they help the whole classroom.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)—Order! The time allotted for the discussion has expired.

SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT (NATIONAL GREEN JOBS CORPS SUPPLEMENT) BILL 2009
Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (4.53 pm)—In continuation: I was trying to give an overall definition of the National Green Jobs Corps program, which is a 26-week environmental work experience and training program that is targeted at low-skilled 17- to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for more than 12 months, especially those who have not completed year 12. The participants are to undertake work experience and skills development on environmental and heritage projects for something like 130 hours of training, leading to a nationally recognised qualification such as a certificate I or certificate II qualification in horticulture, conservation or land management. Participation in the program will also enable young unemployed people to meet their participation obligations for receipt of youth allowance, Newstart allowance or parenting payment income support.

We have been reminded by several speakers that the program is not new. Indeed, a Green Corps program has been operating continuously in Australia from 1997 to 30 June 2009. What is new, however, is that the participants in the updated and renamed program are to be provided, at least temporarily, with a supplement to their income support payments. This is as an incentive both to participate in the program and to assist in this participation. This amounts to an extension of the existing training supplement paid to eligible Newstart allowance and parenting payment (single) recipients who commence approved courses between 1 July of this year and 30 June 2011 to National Green Jobs Corps program participants.

It is interesting to look at the history of a good idea, because that is what this is. Irrespective of how many times we rebadge, rename, restate, redo—whatever you like—in politics a good idea tends to continue. This one can be at least searched back to 1992 and the LEAP program under the Keating government. Then it was dealing with 15-year-olds to 20-year-olds who were looking at a 26-week course. They were involved in issues such as land care, cultural issues, heritage and conservation and they were paid a taxable training allowance based on differential ages. So it has been there in the past—more recently with the last government—and it is continuing with this government. I applaud this government and the policymakers for continuing what is essentially a pretty good idea.
I would like to highlight some of the practical results of the Green Corps program, results which I share with just about everyone in this place—and I know it has been pretty important in your electorate too, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker. One example is the Tasmanian Arboretum, which is located in Melrose, or more specifically Eugenana, where I live. This is a botanical tree park, established in 1984, and is now made up of about 66 hectares of magnificent arboretum. The Green Corps program, through Central Victorian Group Training, has been involved in a number of projects at the arboretum.

When you look at the aims of the program, which are reiterated in our bill, you can look at the development aims for the young people involved, such as leadership and teamwork skills, which I alluded to earlier; skills to liaise with stakeholders; interpersonal skills; confidence in gathering information and presenting outcomes to a variety of audiences; knowledge about the projects and confidence to share that knowledge; self-esteem and self-confidence; and, importantly, the promotion and development of a positive work ethic. They are all very positive characteristics and important skills to develop. The community aims—because these are of a collective nature—are to improve the appearance of the natural areas and open spaces in our community, to reduce invading weed species and to educate the community in aspects of the appreciation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage features. These features in actual fact have been replicated since 1992 all the way through to the present and will continue to be replicated under the excellent program outlined in our legislation.

Looking at some of the outputs of this arboretum project, we see 100 grams of seed were collected, 1,900 trees were planted, 2,000 seedlings were propagated, 200 metres of walking track were constructed and 20 metres of boardwalk, 1,450 metres of fencing were constructed and 6.5 hectares of weeds were removed. That is a pretty good outcome for a small project team, and a lot of hard work and a lot of skills were developed with it as well. Something you would be more familiar with, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker: three self-closing gates were established.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)—I would rather they self-opened!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It was not written here, anyway. They knocked together a brochure explaining what they have done, they put together an information box, they set up distance markers and they designed and made 10 interpretive signs. Again, all good skills and of course they enhanced the magnificent atmosphere and aesthetics of the arboretum.

What other things did they manage to achieve in their Certificate I in Conservation and Land Management, with additional units from Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management? They had to go through an accredited training plan and that meant they had to be prepared for work. Those that passed the certificate I and certificate II were indeed prepared for work. They were able to carry out basic first aid; they were able to follow occupational health and safety procedures; they were able to support the nursery work that was required at the arboretum; they were able to apply chemicals under supervision; they were able to support the natural area conservation; they could operate basic machinery and equipment; they could recognise plants; they could install maintain and repair fencing, and given the distances of the fencing construction, nearly 1,500 metres, that is a fairly good experience I would say; they could plant trees and shrubs; they followed basic chemical safety rules; they undertook propagation activities; they were
able to treat the weeds as well as recognise them and isolate them; and they were able to maintain their workplace. They are very positive outcomes in what was a pretty important program for the arboretum. There were other programs involved with the Green Corps projects in Latrobe, particularly the magnificent Platypus Park, and also in Devonport on the Victoria Parade-Mersey River foreshore.

So, all in all, very good skills and incentives are introduced in this legislation for people to take up training and skills development, with a supplement in addition to act as an incentive. And not only are they developing skills in the area of conservation management and in the environment, but they are also developing very important personal skills and characteristics which will stand them in good stead for the future and allow them to develop not just an individual stock of skills for our community, but collectively they will be very important for this country. I commend the government on this legislation and I am glad that it is getting the full support of this whole parliament.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.03 pm)—I too rise to speak in favour of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. Over the past couple of years I have been very fortunate to attend many Green Corps project launches and graduations in my electorate of Kingston, where I have seen and heard of the great work being done by young people involved in the Green Corps scheme. Having seen the valuable contributions they are making, it is a pleasure now to have risen in support of a bill that will encourage more of our youth to get involved in this program and programs like it throughout Australia.

There have been many impressive Green Corps projects which have taken place in my electorate of Kingston. In October this year I attended the launch of the ‘feral fighters’ Green Corps project in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges. This particular project provides the opportunity for 10 young people to work with park authorities to carry out threat abatement activities. And to protect endangered species, these volunteers are involved in conducting flora and fauna surveys as well as weeding and revegetation projects. Those projects are valuable to the local environment, which will benefit with increased biodiversity and restored native species.

In the past 18 months, two Green Corps projects have also been run in partnership with the Willunga Environment Centre. The Willunga Environment Centre is an excellent centre of education. It has a number of volunteers and also some staff who really promote the environment in the Willunga-McLaren Vale region. In this Green Corps project, participants have planted around 8,000 trees on the Willunga Hill space and along the coastal area of Aldinga. These two projects have also included reef watch monitoring activities and the improvement of local trails and fences and maintenance work on local heritage buildings.

Importantly, the participants have gained valuable skills, many receiving a Certificate I in Conservation and Land Management and a senior first aid certificate. Many participants have also completed a number of units towards their certificate level II. In addition to these formal qualifications, the program has developed valuable workplace skills such as good communication and others concerning an introduction to occupational health and safety standards, and the importance of a good work ethic. But, more importantly, this program has also developed many intangible skills and elements as to these young people.

What has really impressed me is seeing some of these young people when they attend the launch at the beginning of the project and then seeing their development after the 26
weeks at the graduation. What I have seen in all of the graduations that I have attended is a huge increase in self-esteem for these young people. In all of the graduations I have attended, they have got up and said a few words about the things that they have achieved. And apart from all of the more tangible skills and the certificate levels, it has been making friends, it has been developing self-esteem and, most importantly, feeling ‘a sense of agency’ towards being able to get involved and work. Certainly there has been a huge impact that this program has had, and I have been so pleased to be able to witness that improvement in these young people.

This project has also had great success in achieving significant outcomes with the environment. As I have mentioned, there has been so much done. You can look at pictures only of two years ago and see that there were no trees whatsoever on the Willunga Hills. Slowly we are starting to see the Willunga Hills becoming greener from the hard work of the Landcare group, the Willunga Environment Centre and the contribution that the Green Corps students have made. The other important element to this, I believe, is the huge connection that these Green Corps projects have had in terms of the awareness and preservation of the local Indigenous culture of the Kuarna people. This has been a significant theme throughout all the Green Corps projects that have gone through that I have attended.

Another exciting Green Corps project has been taking place in the last two years at McLaren Flat in partnership with Gemtree Vineyards. In this project the Green Corps volunteers have helped return 10 hectares of barren land to its natural condition as wetlands. Gemtree have some representatives here tomorrow for the export awards—they do a great bottle of wine—but they also have a huge commitment to the environment on the land they manage. This has been a great project. Volunteers have been involved in building pathways and platforms and revegetation. Reports back from the partnership have been glowing. I have been told that the volunteers involved have been sensational and incredibly driven, partly because they have been able to see the fruits of their labour transform the local environment. The work being done in these wetlands is also improving the habitat of a number of threatened species, including the Mount Lofty southern emu-wren.

I want to speak about one more project in my electorate, which is in Hallett Cove. This is a Green Corps project that has been restoring the ecosystem of the Lower Field River in partnership with the Friends of the Lower Field River. I have spoken to the Friends of the Lower Field River. This is a group of people who have been working to revegetate this area, but they are all people who are working in daytime jobs and as volunteers they could only meet once a month. The Green Corps project has been able to escalate the revegetation that they have been working on. Participants involved in this program have planted 4,500 trees and propagated 8,000 seedlings. They were also involved in making mosaics, mulching, fencing and the construction of seats. The youth development outcomes of this included confidence and self-esteem, as I mentioned before, based on public speaking, setting goals and then actually achieving and celebrating those achievements, and making a huge difference to the community.

Non-government organisations have been helping these young people in these projects. I would particularly like to pay tribute to the Willunga Environment Centre, Mission SA and Greening Australia. They have been the bodies that have provided the team leaders that have worked with these young people and allowed them to achieve.
I would also like to at this point make mention of the friendship groups. These are all volunteer groups. In each of these projects a friendship group has been involved. What has been really lovely for me to see at the graduations is the strong connection that these young people have made with the volunteers in the friendship groups that are usually—not always, but usually—a little older. This connection between these young people and the volunteers in the area is really important. Certainly a lot of young people I spoke to said that they were learning the value of volunteering and were in fact thinking of volunteering themselves. I think that connection is really appreciated. Friendship groups have been able to impart some of their experience, some of their knowledge to these young people, while the young people, as part of the Green Corps, have been able to fast-track some of the things that the volunteers have not had time to progress.

The outcomes have been incredibly important in my electorate of Kingston. We are also seeing some impressive figures nationwide. Nationally the Green Corps participants have planted more than 14 million trees, erected over 8,000 kilometres of fencing, collected 9,500 kilograms of seeds, and have built or maintained over 5,000 kilometres of boardwalk or walking tracks. As has been the case in Kingston, other electorates will have been significantly improved as a result of the Green Corps program. The Green Corps participants have been a great asset to communities in my electorate and, as I mentioned, to the community groups, as I am sure they have been around the country.

The bill before us today, the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009, will provide for a supplement of $41.60 per fortnight for eligible participants in the National Green Jobs Corps between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. Eligible participants are those receiving youth allowance, Newstart allowance and parenting payment. This money will help cover the expenses incurred by participants involved in the program. It will also act as an incentive for young people to get involved in the schemes being offered in their local area. The 10,000 places provided throughout the life of the program will be targeted at 17- to 24-year-olds without year 12 qualifications who are finding it difficult to engage in the education and training system. During the 26 weeks of the program these participants will be required to undertake skill development and work experience, including 130 hours of accredited training. At the end they will receive a nationally recognised certificate level II qualification.

The scheme forms part of the Prime Minister’s learn or earn policy and is also part of Minister Kate Ellis’s compact with young Australians where, from 1 January 2010, all youth allowance recipients will be required to be in study or training until they receive either a year 12 or certificate II level qualification.

In designing this scheme the government has been guided by past experiences during economic downturns where it has been young people without skills and qualifications who have suffered the most. Our government realises that, just as in the case of the nineties, young people are being hurt by the current economic downturn. To put things in perspective, youth unemployment accounts for a staggering 40 per cent of the growth in unemployment in Australia in the past 12 months.

This bill offers support and incentives for young people to participate in the scheme, which offers skills and qualifications needed in today’s workplace. It goes some way towards helping those most affected by the downturn. We all know how difficult it can be to break into the labour market as a young
worker with minimal experience. I hear stories every day from young people in my electorate talking about the difficulties and indeed I hear it also from their parents. The bill before us today is targeted at government support for young Australians who are finding it hard to make that transition into their working life.

The Green Corps scheme is an important scheme that has a lot to offer our communities. It is about developing our communities, it is about connection in our communities and it is really about giving young Australians, who may have found it difficult, help to develop their formal skills and, as I mentioned, those intangible, informal skills that really will equip young people not just for the workforce of tomorrow but actually for an improved quality of life and improved confidence. I think that is so incredibly important.

In closing, I would like to congratulate everyone that has been involved in the Green Corps projects in my electorate whether they be the community groups, whether they be the non-government training organisations or whether they be the young people themselves. What I have seen in my travels around and looking at these projects is a very good scheme and the amendments before us today will make this scheme even better. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (5.17 pm)—The Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009 has national long-term economic and environmental importance. The National Green Jobs Corps supplement, which is an amendment to the Social Security Act, addresses and supports the now widely recognised statute that the environment and the economy can and indeed need to work hand-in-hand. The Green Jobs Corps commences on 1 January, giving 10,000 young people the opportunity to develop green skills for their working future through a 26-week accredited training program. As we just heard the member for Kingston say, it is also about developing our community and connecting the community as well, and this will play a big role in that particular sphere.

The government is taking steps through this amendment to address the needs of two of our most precious resources, our young people and the environment. The government is committing $94 million over three years to create 50,000 new jobs and training places. That is 30,000 apprenticeships, the 10,000 Green Jobs Corps places, 6,000 local jobs that focus on sustainability in financially ravaged communities and 4,000 training places for the long-term and disadvantaged unemployed.

This initiative will not just give young people work; it will give them vital training in an area of ever growing importance. Protecting the environment is the way of the future and it is going to be, for many, the employment of the future. The National Green Jobs Corps will give underskilled and underutilised young people the opportunity to get involved in worthwhile work, to do something of value for themselves and the environment and to develop careers in what is certain to be one of the major markets of the future. For many, this would be an ideal career path and we are helping them take it. They will get 130 hours of accredited training, leading to a nationally recognised qualification. They will learn skills and gain accreditation in the areas of bush regeneration, erosion control, beach and dune rehabilitation and habitat protection. Young people across Australia have shown not just a willingness but an absolute enthusiasm to be involved in green matters, in sustainability and in helping to preserve and protect the environment.
In my electorate of Hindmarsh, as I go around and visit schools and community groups I see great enthusiasm and that enthusiasm is seen in a raft of projects and broader initiatives, including school projects. The electorate of Hindmarsh is home to more than 15 kilometres of Adelaide’s pristine coastline. It is one of the most pristine and picturesque coastlines not only in Australia but, I would say, in the world. It has tidal estuaries, natural sand dunes, wetlands and conservation parks, all within a few kilometres of the CBD of central Adelaide. It houses a multitude of aquatic and bird life and more than 30 species of indigenous plant life. The residents in Hindmarsh along that coastline have an affinity with their local environment and a strong desire to protect it.

The commitment runs from small children through to retired people. For example, the Cowandilla Primary School was named one of the most environmentally sustainable primary schools in the world last year after its success in the international solar cities schools competition. I am proud to be a former scholar of Cowandilla Primary School and I would like to congratulate them on their efforts to educate students in water conservation and biodiversity; it is inspirational stuff.

We also have many organisations, residents groups and community groups, for example the Friends of Patawalonga Creek led by Andrew Winkler, who started the group. They have done great work over the past 21 years preserving and protecting the remaining reed beds and wetlands between Glenelg and Port Adelaide. On National Tree Planting Day they organise a huge contingent of people who plant all sorts of natural habitat. This particular area has seen a dramatic change from being an area that was ravaged to now one that is going back to its natural environment.

Volunteer groups like Henley and Grange Dunecare, the Tennyson Dunes Group and Semaphore Park Coastcare have been giving their time to protect our precious dunes through seed propagation, revegetation and community education. Their work alongside the local Charles Sturt City Council is helping to protect the flora and fauna of some breathtaking coastal areas. We also have the Friends of Gulf St Vincent and the Henley and Grange Residents Association. When there is any degradation to the environment they inform me and ensure that they are very vigilant in letting the authorities know and come up with solutions. I am very proud to have those groups in my electorate. The work done by all of these groups shows that the broader community cares about the environment. They give their time for free to protect it. Imagine how much safer and more protected the environment becomes when we, as a skilled workforce, join the fight.

To get that skilled workforce we have to make sure we take the opportunity now to get it right. The National Green Jobs Corps addresses the inadequacies and the limitations brought on previously by the policy of the coalition when it simply rebadged the Keating government’s 1992 LEAP and tried to pass it off as their own initiative. The coalition restricted this sort of training to people aged 17 to 20, therefore telling an unemployed 21-year-old they were too old to learn new skills. We have extended the age limit to 25. The coalition offered no financial incentive, but we will provide a training supplement of more than $40 per fortnight.

The National Green Jobs Corps has been well received across the board by industry, environmental groups and unions. It is a most welcome initiative in my electorate of Hindmarsh. Heather Ridout of the Australian Industry Group believes the plan will address the shortfall in Australia’s national green skills capacity. Tony Mohr of the Australian
Conservation Foundation has given it his tick of approval. Sharan Burrow of the ACTU has praised the initiative for its support of young Australians hard hit by the economic downturn. The initiative has broad appeal because it is doing something practical to address issues that are going to become even more important in the years ahead. It is helping create a sustainable future not only for our environment but for the people who are going to be living in it. The beneficiaries of this initiative will be the next generation of Australians.

As I said, the bill will amend social security laws to provide for a temporary National Green Jobs Corps supplement for recipients of youth allowance, Newstart allowance and the parenting payment who participate in the National Green Jobs Corps. The National Green Jobs Corps is a 26-week environmental work experience and training program targeted at low-skill 17- to 24-year-olds. Additional financial assistance will be provided to these participants in the form of a supplement of $41.60 per fortnight whilst they are participating in the National Green Jobs Corps. This payment will be on top of their existing youth allowance, Newstart allowance or the parenting payment. The supplement will be payable to those who commence in the National Green Jobs Corps between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (5.26 pm)—It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. This legislation provides a double whammy, really, in terms of outcome. This bill is about protecting the environment and providing young people with meaningful jobs. It is another example of a Labor bill that achieves multiple positive outcomes, providing young people with really good, satisfying jobs where they gain knowledge and skill. The detail of the legislation includes amendments to the Social Security Act 1991 to provide for a National Green Jobs Corps supplement for eligible recipients of youth allowance, Newstart allowance and the parenting payment. This bill introduces a temporary National Green Jobs Corps supplement. This supplement will assist low-skill job seekers receiving youth allowance, Newstart allowance or the parenting payment when they are undertaking the new environmental work experience program through the National Green Jobs Corps.

So much good work has been done in my electorate of Corangamite through Green Corps. I note that is the case across many other parts of Australia. It is great to see young people engaged, learning things and being outdoors and active, and they are doing some very useful work that enhances the environment and builds our communities. Green Corps projects have been undertaken right across the Surf Coast, the Bellarine Peninsula, the Otway Ranges and many other parts of my electorate. It is a fantastic program. We are now, through this legislation, aligning the National Green Jobs Corps with the government’s Compact with Young Australians. The government’s Compact with Young Australians guarantees a training place to those under the age of 25 who are not employed to ensure they have the skills needed for the economic recovery. When they complete the program the majority of participants will have attained a certificate level II qualification. This is consistent with the Compact with Young Australians where job seekers aged under 20 without a year 12 qualification are encouraged to attain a year 12 equivalent qualification.

The supplement will be available to youth allowance, Newstart allowance and parenting payment recipients who are participating in National Green Jobs Corps. Eligible recipients will receive an extra $41.60 per fort-
night while they participate in the program. The training supplement will be available for people commencing in National Green Jobs Corps between the period 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011.

The National Green Jobs Corps program is now a very significant national program. From very humble beginnings, it has become a real force for change. Ten thousand places will be provided through the life of the program over the next two years. These places are targeted at 17- to 24-year-olds without a year 12 qualification, who often struggle to engage in education and the training system. This program will provide structured work experience and accredited training.

The National Green Jobs Corps supplement is an additional payment of $41.60 per fortnight to help eligible participants receiving income support payments meet the costs incurred by participating in the program. It will also act as an incentive, encouraging young people to participate in the program. It will be available for participants who commence before 2012.

The thing I particularly like about the Green Corps is the way it is being used to specifically target young, low-skilled people who are looking for that opportunity. Instead of young people being left to their own devices, this provides them with an opportunity to gain the necessary skills to participate in our economy. It provides work that has real worth. It teaches skills to those who need skills. It brings young people together in a useful and interesting way to participate in environmental activities. It gets young people into places that are interesting. It gets young people working cooperatively together.

The payments to young people through this scheme that support the costs involved in participating in the scheme are also targeted. The supplement is limited to those who receive income support payments, in recognition that they are in a group which generally needs support and help. It is important to note in relation to this program that it has been extended to 17-year-olds. This will bring the program into line with the Compact with Young Australians, which requires, from 1 January 2010, that all youth allowance recipients be studying or training until they get a year 12 qualification or a certificate II qualification. Those who are unable to study will be required to participate in activities such as part-time work, part-time study or training for 25 hours a week.

That means that there will be a large group of 17-year-olds who will be seeking to participate in the National Green Jobs Corps in order to meet that eligibility requirement. I believe that is a very good thing. As many people know, 17 is a very vulnerable age. A lot of 17-year-olds have found themselves out of the education system and in difficulty with the law and others. This program brings them under an umbrella that will provide very positive steps for their future.

This is another example of how the Rudd government is supporting young people into work and educational activities. I have no doubt that there will be many young people who will be inspired by what they do during their Green Corps program training, and their lives will be turned around and enhanced as a consequence. As we know, the Labor government are moving on multiple fronts to support young Australians. We are improving educational opportunities by improving student income support, building better high schools and universities and engaging in a national dialogue led by the Prime Minister between the federal government and young people. We are developing preventative programs on issues such as alcohol abuse and helping on a wide range of other areas. We are giving young people a helping hand wherever we can. This bill, of course, is an-
Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (5.34 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. This bill amends the Social Security Act to provide for a national green jobs supplement of $41.60 per fortnight for eligible young people on top of their existing income support payment. The supplement will be paid to participants in the National Green Jobs Corps program who receive income support via youth allowance, Newstart allowance or parenting payment. The National Green Jobs Corps will give up to 10,000 young Australians the opportunity to develop skills and help the environment through 26 weeks of accredited training and work experience. The funding agreement commences on 1 January 2010 and will run until 31 December 2011. The National Green Jobs Corps program is a separate program to the existing Green Corps program and does not replace it. There are strong similarities between the programs with the projects they work on and outcomes they achieve for local communities, about which I will speak further later in my speech.

The National Green Jobs Corps program is specifically designed to assist young people aged 17 to 24 to gain skills and work experience during this time of global economic crisis. The program focuses on equipping young Australians with the skills to fill job opportunities in emerging green and climate change related industries. The structured projects through the program link these young people with their community and allow them to work on the protection, conservation and rejuvenation of Australia’s natural and cultural heritage.

The two most significant challenges that we as a government face today are the global economic crisis and how to halt the destruction of our natural environment worldwide. At the heart of these two challenges is providing a future for young Australians—and, importantly, a future with a natural environment that is preserved and protected. To do so, we need to address issues such as global warming, land degradation, salinity and habitat loss.

As Australia moves to being a low-carbon economy, we need to make sure there are employment opportunities for young people in industries that will be part of this low-carbon future. In July this year the Prime Minister announced that the federal government would spend $94 million over three years to create 50,000 new green jobs and training places. Ten thousand of these training places are in the National Green Jobs Corps. History shows that in times of economic downturn, as we have seen during this current global economic crisis, youth unemployment rises faster than the general rate of unemployment. Young people who have not completed year 12 or equivalent are the most vulnerable in difficult economic times.

That is why the Prime Minister announced at the April 2009 Council of Australian Governments meeting our Compact with Young Australians. This compact means that every Australian aged between 15 and 24 who is not in the workforce will be entitled to an education or training place. The Compact with Young Australians partners with state and territory governments and business and education providers to deliver a better future for young people in Australia. At the time, the Prime Minister also announced the ‘earn or learn’ policy, whereby, to continue receiving youth allowance, a person under 21 without a year 12 or equivalent qualification must be in education or training to receive income support.

In June this year the government introduced the training supplement of $41.60 for
young Australians who commence an approved course of study from 1 July 2009. This bill introduces a similar supplement of $41.60 paid to people who commence in the National Green Jobs Corps program. This income supplement recognises the additional costs someone on an income support payment may face in travelling to and from the Green Jobs Corps project location as well serving as an incentive for young people to get involved in this excellent program.

I will briefly refer to the program’s environmental benefits. The kinds of projects that this program will involve include bush regeneration and the planting of native trees, erosion control, beach and dune rehabilitation, habitat protection for wildlife and construction and restoration of walking and nature tracks, about which I will speak more later when I discuss projects in my local area. The projects also include important scientific research and education assistance such as biodiversity monitoring, surveys and audits of flora and fauna and consultation and education with the community on environmental matters.

Over the years, I have been associated with numerous environmental restoration projects in my electorate, including the Dry Creek Linear Park, the Little Para River Linear Park and the Cobbler Creek Linear Park, the most recent of these being the Green Corps project at the western end of Cobbler Creek, which the Minister for Home Affairs—who at the time was the Minister for Employment Participation—and I visited earlier this year. The Green Corps project involved 10 young people working on a 26-week restoration project along the Cobbler Creek watercourse. Their work involved the establishment of a walking trail, construction of a creek crossing and undertaking soil, water, animal and vegetation surveys. I was also pleased to be able to attend the graduation ceremony for the participants, in May 2009, at the completion of the project. In May 2009 I also represented the minister at the launch of the Black Hill Green Corps project in the Northern Lofty district of Adelaide. The project also enabled participants to plant trees, construct walking tracks and fencing, remove weeds and complete surveys of plants and wildlife.

What the visit to Cobbler Creek highlighted to both the member for Gorton—the minister—and me, and what my visit to the Mount Lofty site highlighted, was both the environmental and social value of those projects. Young people who had dropped out of school, who had little hope of securing meaningful employment and whose future was very uncertain, participated in the Green Corps and subsequently had a much more positive outlook on life. They learned new skills and learned how to work with others. They embraced responsibility and saw their confidence and self-esteem lifted when their project was completed. They were able to see the results of their work and the contribution they had made to restoring part of a community linear park. Just as importantly, they learned about the importance and relevance of our environment to the overall wellbeing of communities. The Cobbler Creek site and the areas in the Adelaide Hills are locations where the natural landscape had been seriously degraded by human activities. It is only in recent years that we have truly appreciated the damage we have done to the natural environment and the devastating effect this has had on the ecosystem, water, soil quality and the habitat of local plants and animals.

Having spoken to many of the young people who were involved in both of those projects, I was able to see firsthand the effect that it had on their lives and how it had in fact changed their lives around. Most of the participants who started in both of those projects stayed on until the end. A couple did
not, but those who did certainly came away as much better people for the commitment they had made. I remember speaking to the young people at the Cobbler Creek project. Because part of the time that they spent working on that linear park was in the middle of the heatwave that we endured in Adelaide earlier on this year, I said to them: ‘What did you do on those extremely hot days and how did you find it?’ The response was something like this: ‘It was tough going but we weren’t going to quit or give up. We were committed to what we were doing and we were prepared to work through the heat.’ That is an incredible commitment by young people who, prior to that, had no commitment to anything. Because they understood the work they were doing, because they learned to understand the importance of it and because they had collectively embarked on a project, they were determined to see it through. Those kinds of qualities will stay with them for the rest of their lives. It is those kinds of experiences that are so important for young people who otherwise, as I said earlier, would probably have a very bleak future.

Importantly, many of these projects are located in rural and regional Australia, where the local environment is often most in need of restoration. In such cases, the local community and farmers receive benefits such as improved water management and reduced salinity from the environmental restoration work.

There is another environmental perspective to this debate associated with restoring and preserving our environment, and that is regarding climate change and our ability to reduce our carbon emissions. We are, as most members of this House would know, in the midst of a national and international debate relating to climate change—climate change that, on the most credible scientific advice available across the world, is largely attributable to human activity raising carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

On Tuesday 17 November, I, along with a number of other members of this House, attended a breakfast hosted by the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, otherwise known as FASTS. The presentation was about the emissions reduction targets and the impact of those emissions on the Great Barrier Reef. It was made by a number of Australia’s leading scientists, people who have spent most of their lives working in and around the Great Barrier Reef and in the scientific fields that they are now expert in. Their presentations were made on the basis of findings which have been peer reviewed, and they are quite happy to have anyone else question the findings that they brought to us.

There were some important facts presented at the briefing that I would like to share with the House. They are as follows. More than 100 nations have endorsed the goal of limiting average global warming to no more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures. Many locations, including the Great Barrier Reef, would still be at risk even under this scenario. To achieve a 50 per cent chance of avoiding this two-degree rise, global emissions need to peak no later than 2020 and then reduce by 80 to 90 per cent below 2000 emission levels by the year 2050. To achieve this, emissions from industrialised countries by 2020 need to be reduced by at least 25 per cent relative to their 2000 levels. Those are serious challenges for us and the point that the scientists were making to us was that, even if we can do all that, we stand a 50–50 chance of saving the Great Barrier Reef. The point I make about all this is that the work carried out under this kind of project is going to be very important in achieving those targets.
The emissions that I referred to earlier on have been elevated as a result of both carbon pollution human activities and the wide-scale clearing of vegetation across the world—which, in turn, would have otherwise absorbed atmospheric carbon. In other words, whilst carbon emissions are rising, the natural capacity of the earth to absorb carbon is falling. I would also like to quote from the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, from their publication *Optimising Carbon in the Australian Landscape*. It says:

Terrestrial carbon includes carbon stored in forests, woodlands, swamps, grasslands, farm-land, soils, and derivatives of these carbon stores, including biochar and biofuels.

The power of terrestrial carbon to contribute to the climate change solution is profound.

At a global scale, a 15% increase in the world’s terrestrial carbon stock would remove the equivalent of all the carbon pollution emitted from fossil fuels since the beginning of the industrial revolution.

Revegetation programs, such as those associated with the National Green Jobs Corps projects, are invaluable in restoring the ecology and sustainability of the environment, resulting in a much more effective carbon absorbing environment. The key to successful environmental management is to think globally and act locally, and that is exactly what the investment in the National Green Jobs Corps projects do. It was also interesting that, in the presentation made in respect of the Great Barrier Reef, the point was made that what is also contributing to the damage to the reef is in fact what is happening on the land and the waters that flow out onto the reef. Again, this is all related to the clearing of areas and the run-off from the land into the reef, and it is all related to creating a sustainable environment back on the land.

These are serious matters that we, as a parliament, are trying to grapple with. This particular initiative of government I believe is invaluable because, on the one hand, at a time of economic downturn, it provides an employment and training opportunity for young people. Secondly, it provides employment and training to those young people who are probably the most disadvantaged and who would have the most difficulty in getting into full-time employment elsewhere. It is important because it restores the natural landscape and vegetation on land in so many parts of the country, in a way that will benefit the local communities in the long term, as has been the case with respect to the linear parks that I referred to earlier on. Those linear parks, as a result of this kind of activity over the past two decades, have now become some of the most used recreational areas in my electorate—all because the local communities took it upon themselves, commencing about two decades ago, to gradually but methodically restore those river systems to their natural state and, at the same time, create the walking trails through them without causing any additional detriment to the local water course. It is initiatives like that that I commend.

The Green Corps program and the funding required would have to be one of the most effective climate change investments made by this parliament. I welcome the opportunity that the National Green Jobs Corps program will give young people at a time of global economic crisis to improve their lives and the environment, and I commend this bill to the House.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (5.52 pm)—I thank all members who participated in the debate on the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. In a moment I will address some of the issues that have been raised, but first let us remember the purpose of this bill. This bill will provide a National Green Jobs Corps
supplement of $41.60 per fortnight for participants in the National Green Jobs Corps who receive Newstart allowance, youth allowance (other) or the parenting payment. The reason for this supplement is to give job seekers an incentive to participate in this program and to support them as they work on National Green Jobs Corps projects. Up to 10,000 young people will participate in the program over the next two years, starting on 1 January 2010. Participants in the program will receive 26 weeks of accredited training and work experience as they work on projects that make environmental improvements now and develop the green skills that Australia needs for the future.

The lesson from previous recessions is that in an economic downturn it is young people who suffer the most. Youth unemployment accounted for over 40 per cent of the increase in unemployment between August 2008 and August 2009. Many of these young people have not completed high school. These are sobering statistics, but they would be a lot worse if it were not for the government’s economic stimulus package. There are a lot of young people now working in retail stores and on construction sites who would have been unemployed if we had adopted the opposition’s strategy of doing nothing and letting the market take its course. Our strategy is very different. It is based on the lessons of past recessions.

In the 1990s young people who had not finished school were three times more likely to be out of work and not studying than those that they once shared a classroom with. Today, the situation is very similar. That is why we have introduced the Compact with Young Australians based on the policy principle of learn or earn. ‘Learn or earn’ means that young people under the age of 21 without a year 12 or equivalent qualification must be in education or training in order to qualify for youth allowance. The National Green Jobs Corps is an important part of this policy. The National Green Jobs Corps is targeted at young people who have not finished year 12 or an equivalent qualification, because skills count. The opportunity to undertake accredited training while participating in the National Green Jobs Corps will help give young people the skills that they need.

Another lesson from the recession of the 1990s is that, when times get tough, apprenticeships and apprenticeship opportunities dry up and it can take a long time for them to return to prerecession levels. In 1990, 35,000 people started an apprenticeship in a traditional trade like carpentry or plumbing. In 1991 this dropped to 23,000, a drop of 35 per cent. It was 2004, 13 years later, before we again recruited more than 35,000 traditional trade apprentices a year. It is this great gulf in new apprenticeships that contributed to the skill shortages that we faced in the past few years and that the Liberal Party when in government did nothing about.

The shadow minister has correctly pointed out that apprenticeship numbers have dropped by about 20 per cent over the last 12 months. For the last few months I have been on the road with Lindsay Fox and Bill Kelty. Employers we have met from south-west Sydney to south-west Perth have all told us the same thing—that they were struggling with the effects of the global recession and they needed more support and help from government to put on apprentices at the moment. That is why the government has tripled the first year incentive paid to employers who take on an apprentice from $1,500 to $4,850. This is called the Apprentice Kickstart and will support as many as 21,000 apprentices entering a trade this summer. Kevin Cohen from Co-Wyn Building Contractors told yesterday’s edition of the Canterbury-Bankstown Express:
It’s a tremendous incentive for businesses and young people. It gives them an opportunity to get their foot in the door …

That is right. Apprentice Kickstart has also been endorsed by the Group Training Association; the Housing Industry Association; Skills Tasmania; Skill360, which is based in Northern Queensland; the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and the shadow minister. Mr Peter Andersen, the New South Wales Chairman of the Group Training Association and the General Manager of the Wagga based apprentice and employment specialist GTES, said:

For some months we have been saying that extra incentives are needed for the employment of apprentices in order to overcome the financial issues currently plaguing Australia as well as helping correct the skills shortage.

The program will go a long way to playing a positive role in achieving these outcomes.

That is from the *Daily Advertiser* of 19 October. On 20 October in the *Maitland Mercury*, Shane Goodwin, the Deputy Managing Director of the Housing Industry Association, said:

The extra payments to employers taking on an apprentice in the period of December to February, when there will be a jump in the number of school leavers, is well timed.

Not only is there an additional payment up-front for employers taking on an apprentice, but the offer of a further $2,500 at nine months should be helpful in addressing retention in the first year.

While demand for apprenticeships has been affected by the downturn in building and construction, the time to be investing in apprenticeships is precisely now so that we might soften the impact of skill shortages when the industry moves into recovery.

The additional apprenticeship incentives are well-targeted on traditional trades and represent good value for money.

Mark Sayer, the General Manager of Skills Tasmania, said:

Incentives often work and this is a good one.

I believe it will prompt employers to take people on.

Troy Williams—whom I met only a couple of weeks ago—the Chief Executive of Skill360, which is based in Northern Queensland, said:

Not only does it do the right thing by 21,000 young people, it provides our economy with the skills that it will require when the economic recovery gets fully under way.

Many companies are finding it difficult to recruit qualified trades people, even in the current economic climate.

Peter Anderson, the Chief Executive of ACCI, said:

Initiatives like these are practical and responsive to our labour market needs. They minimise the risk of skill shortages arising from the shortfall in apprenticeship enrolments during the current economic downturn.

Finally, in the *Bendigo Advertiser* on 17 October, Andrew Southcott, the shadow minister, said:

We think it’s targeted in the right area.

We thank you for that contribution.

Several speakers in this debate spoke about the former government’s Green Corps program. I think it is important to make a couple of points here. There are three important differences between the new National Green Jobs Corps and Green Corps. First, the National Green Jobs Corps is larger than Green Corps. Green Corps funded about 1,700 places a year. This new program will fund up to 5,000 a year, or 10,000 places over the next two years. Second, the National Green Jobs Corps is targeted at young people most at risk of being unemployed. Unlike the previous government’s program, it is targeted at young people who have not completed year 12 or an equivalent qualification. Third, a key component of the National Green Jobs Corps is accredited training. While Green
Corps had a training component, this was not always accredited or at a level equivalent to a year 12 qualification. The National Green Jobs Corps provides 130 hours of accredited training at the level of certificate II, with the flexibility to adapt to certificate I if required by the participant’s needs. As the member for Gippsland noted earlier in this debate, ‘This is a step forward for program participants,’ and I welcome his contribution.

The shadow minister was very critical in this debate of what he called ‘training for training’s sake.’ No-one wants training for training’s sake. That is why I made a number of changes to the National Green Jobs Corps draft request for tender. The member for Dunkley will be pleased to hear this. He can tell the providers he met down in the greater Frankston-Mornington Peninsula area that, as a result of feedback I have received, the draft request for tender was amended. I will give you two examples: (1) if a program participant gets a job after completing 13 weeks of the program, their provider will receive the full financial benefits of a place completion—one of the concerns raised by a number of people who gave me feedback as part of the draft request for tender and an issue of concern raised by the member for Dunkley, which has now been addressed; and, (2) if a participant enters the National Green Jobs Corps from stream 1 of Job Services Australia and does not get a job while on the program, they do not go back to the start of stream 1. Instead, they will re-enter JSA at the 13-week mark, meaning they will get immediate access to skills assessment from their provider. The provider will then be able to arrange intensive activity matched to the job seeker’s needs. The provider will also update the job seeker’s employment pathway plan. This was not something raised in the feedback we received to the draft RFT but it was something which I thought was important—to ensure that people who participated in this program did not go back to the start of stream 1 and have to wait 13 weeks before they got access to this support and assistance. These changes are designed to help the transition from training to work. These changes, along with a number of others, have also been endorsed by the employment services industry.

This debate is not the first time the shadow minister has spoken about ‘training for training’s sake’. He will know, because we were there together, that he also made this point at the National Employment Services Association Conference in Sydney back in August. He referred there to the research of James Riccio from the MDRC centre in New York from 1994 and argued that work programs were more effective than training programs and, therefore, that the government should move away from supporting training.

The only problem with this research is that it is out of date. A succession of more recent studies has shown the need for a mix of training and work programs. I refer here to research by Hotz, Imbens, and Klerman in 2001; Gueron and Hamilton in 2002; Ochel in 2004; and Huber, Lechner, Wunsh and Walter this year. All of those pieces of research reach the same conclusion—that is, that the best results come from a mixture of job search and work focused education or training. That is what the research says and that is exactly what we are doing. That is why we have developed the National Green Jobs Corps, the Apprentice Kickstart and the reforms to Job Services Australia.

I note the opposition have gone a little quiet about Job Services Australia since July. Earlier this year they predicted turmoil. They said that JSA was convoluted and ill-conceived. The fact is the implementation of Job Services Australia has been a lot smoother than anyone predicted. Over the
last few months I have been talking to JSA providers across the country—from Bankstown to Burnie and, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, Mr Gray, will attest, from Caboolture to Kwinana. They all say the same thing—that is, that the transition has been a lot better than in 2003 and a lot better than in 1998. The Chief Executive Officer of the National Employment Services Association, NESA, Sally Sinclair, said:

… we are in the midst of the most successful transition in Australian employment services history with Job Services Australia.

In reflecting on the long winding road we have traversed to this point in Job Services Australia’s existence, there is little doubt that the partnership approach adopted by Government and industry has been a major factor in the success of implementation thus far …

We congratulate DEWR and the Government for adopting this partnership approach in the development of the framework and transition.

Already more than 100,000 job seekers have been placed in work. An important point is that 37 per cent of those 100,000 are people with major barriers to employment, coming from streams 3 and 4 of Job Services Australia. We are off to a good start but we are still operating in a very difficult economic environment. Unemployment is predicted to continue to rise over the course of the next nine months. This government will continue to work hard to make sure there is the right mix of training and work options available to all job seekers. And the National Green Jobs Corps is an important part of this work.

The National Green Jobs Corps will start on 1 January next year. Tenders to deliver the program have now closed and successful tenderers will be announced shortly. I would like to thank the employment services industry for their assistance in structuring this program, for the feedback they have provided in putting the scheme together and for the enthusiasm they have applied to deliver the National Green Jobs Corps. Again, I thank all members for their contribution to this debate. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Boothby has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (6.06 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Organised crime can be found across the country and even regional centres and remote communities are not immune to the activities of criminal organisations.

The Australian Crime Commission likens organised criminal ‘enterprises’ to conventional businesses in the kinds of measures they adopt to ensure good business outcomes. These include risk mitigation strategies; the buying-in of expertise—legal and financial, for example—and remaining abreast of market and regulatory change. The principal difference, of course, is that their business activities and profits are illegal. Organised crime costs Australia at least $15 billion each year. Serious and organised crime not only results in substantial economic cost to the Australian community but also operates at great social cost. Organised crime can threaten the integrity of political and other public institutional systems through the infiltration of these systems and the subsequent corruption of public officials. Consequently, this undermines public confidence in those institutions and impedes the delivery of good government services, law enforcement and justice. Along with this are the emotional, physical and psychological costs to the victims of organised crime and their families and communities.

This bill builds on reforms proposed in the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Serious and Organised Crime) Bill 2009, which was introduced into the House in June 2009. As stated in the explanatory memorandum, the bill implements legislative aspects of the national response to organised crime that were not implemented by the first bill and includes additional measures to strengthen existing laws to more effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute organised criminal activity and target the proceeds of organised criminal groups. Whilst the second bill is a continuation of the first bill, it is important to note that it does the following: it strengthens criminal asset confiscation and anti-money laundering laws; enhances search and seizure powers and the ability of law enforcement to access data from electronic equipment; improves the operation of the National Witness Protection Program, including by increasing protection for current and former participants and officers involved in its operation; introduces new offences that would target persons involved in organised crime; facilitates greater access to telecommunications interception for the investigation of new serious and organised crime offences; improves the operation and accountability of the Australian Crime Commission; aims to improve money laundering, bribery and drug importation offences; and makes minor and consequential amendments to correct references to provisions. The bill also makes an urgent amendment to preserve the ability of federal defendants in Victoria to appeal a finding that they are unfit to plead.

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee has just concluded its inquiry into the bill. The coalition supports the comments made by the Liberal senators on the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee in their inquiry on the bill. Notably, we support the aim of the bill to enhance the capacity of the Commonwealth to prevent, investigate and prosecute organised criminal activity. We also endorse the view of the committee that some provisions in the bill may go further than necessary to achieve this purpose and, in doing so, may unnecessarily intrude on the rights of individuals. The Liberal senators supported the recommendations in the Senate committee’s report which seek to remedy this but queried whether those recommendations go far enough.

We consider that some additional changes to the bill, proposed by the Law Council, are worthy of consideration. In particular, the Law Council proposed: defining the term
‘facilitate’, which is used in the proposed association offences, to ensure it does not capture activities that are only of peripheral relevance to the commission of an offence; making the test under subsection 3L(1A) of the Crimes Act, for when data accessible from electronic equipment located at search premises may be copied, ‘reasonable grounds to believe that the data constitutes evidential material’; limiting the power of an ACC examiner to detain an uncooperative witness to circumstances where the examiner believes, on reasonable grounds, that it is necessary to detain the person in order to secure that person’s attendance before the court; and deleting proposed subsection 34C(3) of the Australian Crime Commission Act, which would provide that a certificate issued by an ACC examiner in relation to an alleged contempt is prima facie evidence of the matters that it sets out.

In relation to the organised crime offences proposed by the bill, the Law Council, in its submission to the inquiry on the bill, said:

In recent years, in the name of tackling serious and organised crime, law enforcement agencies have been provided with significantly enhanced investigative powers and new offences and civil proceedings have been created to allow law enforcement agencies to target the money trail.

It is of concern that despite the reported success of these measures, there is a suggestion that there is still a need for further fundamental law reform, to alter the very principles of criminal responsibility.

If every time law enforcement agencies feel impotent in the face of a particular type of offending, we amend not just the content of our laws but the manner in which we apportion criminal responsibility and adjudicate guilt, then the integrity of our criminal justice system will quickly be compromised.

This caution applies equally to the provisions of the bill proposing expanded search and information gathering powers and new powers for the Australian Crime Commission to deal with uncooperative witnesses. The Liberal senators on the committee noted that it was not sufficient justification for a continual expansion in the powers available to law enforcement agencies and the reach of criminal offences to point simply to the difficulties allegedly faced in pursuing particular groups of offenders. The task of law enforcement officers and prosecutors may well be challenging but to address this by diluting basic criminal justice principles and oversimplifying the arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of people would jeopardise the most fundamental individual rights. The changes proposed by this second bill—and by the first bill—ought to be viewed as being at the outer limit of the powers the parliament will countenance for law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, the Liberal senators noted their intention to monitor closely, through the estimates process, whether these powers were being exercised appropriately and whether practice bore out arguments that they were necessary to tackle organised crime. The coalition reserves the right to move amendments in the Senate along the lines of the recommendations made by the Senate committee, which I note have bipartisan support.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (6.14 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Serious and Organised Crime) Bill (No. 2) 2009. I want to put on the record a few comments about what it will do and I want to raise a couple of questions. Organised crime costs Australia approximately $15 billion per year. The Attorney-General has made that statement in this House on a few occasions, including in his second reading speech on this bill. That is a lot of wasted money and I know there would be more than that, because it is not easily quantified when you are dealing with organised crime. I would say that would be a conservative amount of money we are talking about. I
would be really interested in seeing the methodology applied to the quantification of this but I know it would be extremely difficult. Can you imagine what services we could deliver to the community if we had that $15 billion?

I know that no jurisdiction will ever be free of organised crime and it would be unrealistic to think that, although it would be good. But we, the lawmakers, have a responsibility to take whatever preventative action we can, both to prevent it and to make it harder to do. Sometimes, that is where action has to be directed. We will not always be able to prevent it but we have to make it a lot harder. We also need to be able to punish it. We have a responsibility to try and stay one step ahead, and therein lies the challenge. When we are introducing laws and enhancing laws and increasing penalties and increasing the powers of our law enforcers, who do quite a good job in this area, we also have to be mindful of our liberties—that is, yours, mine and the community’s. We need to try and always be mindful of calibrating our responses accordingly and getting that balance. Therein lies the biggest challenge for us as lawmakers in this place, but that responsibility falls heavily on the Attorney-General.

One of the threats we face from organised crime is people trafficking. That would have to be one of the most odious, obscene crimes that exist. How you can traffic in people is beyond me. Other threats are the importation of narcotics, community violence and identity crime. We have been reading a lot about identity crime lately. It is rather alarming to think that people can have their identity stolen, and there have been situations where they have really had to struggle to get it back, so to speak. It is just unbelievable. Money laundering and labour exploitation are also really big.

The Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, SCAG, agreed to measures to support a national response. SCAG did this at its meetings in April and August this year. This bill and other legislative measures reflect the high level of cooperation among the attorneys-general, and it is a demonstration of their desire—that is, the governments of all levels represented there—to effect a coordinated effort to combat organised crime. I see that the Attorney-General has just joined us here in the chamber. He has done a lot of work in this area, with the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, to get the bill that we have before the House today.

The legislative measures contained therein broadly cover three key areas. They are the enhancement of criminal offences, including penalties; the enhancement of criminal asset confiscation; and the enhancement of police powers, where it is deemed necessary in this area. Importantly, it targets unexplained wealth. Unexplained wealth, of itself, does not mean it is the proceeds of organised crime, but it is one of the indicators. Unexplained wealth is a situation that has no place in modern society.

Organised crime is something that exists. It exists in our Asia-Pacific region. It exists internationally, but it certainly exists in the Asia-Pacific region. A lot of it exists underground but it also exists above ground. Organised crime networks use the tools and mechanisms of legitimacy to try and legitimise, to track, what they do. They try to use businesses and banks and all of the other mechanisms that we use. The internet also has become a powerful tool for a lot of things, including organised crime.

The overview of the bill is that implementing legislative agreements of the national response will have the following effects: it will introduce new criminal organisation and association offences; it will en-
hance the law enforcement capacity vis-a-vis the money-laundering, bribery and drug importation offences; and it will increase penalties for bribing a foreign official and a Commonwealth public official. It is important to increase the penalties but that has to work side by side with other mechanisms of law enforcement. The legislative agreements will allow seized materials to be shared among Commonwealth, state, territory and foreign law enforcement agencies—the latter, I would imagine, with the appropriate protocols in place. It strengthens the Commonwealth confiscation regime regarding criminal assets and it will improve the National Witness Protection Program, which is really important. It will do that by amending the Witness Protection Act 1994. As we know, that act provides protection and assistance to people who are assessed as being in danger because they have agreed to give evidence or a statement that can be used in criminal and certain other proceedings, because of their relationship to such a person.

The amendment will provide increased protection and security for witnesses and others included in the program—I take ‘others’ to be associates and members of that person’s family—as well as officers involved in the operation. It is important that people caught within the ambit of the program are given protection. It will allow protection and assistance available under the National Witness Protection Program to be extended to former participants and other related persons where appropriate. Importantly, it will also ensure that state and territory participants are afforded the same protection and have the same obligations as Commonwealth participants. I cannot go into detail here, but I recently had a situation where somebody sought my assistance in that area. It was not without its problems—let’s put it that way. I will leave that there. Anything that can enhance that protection I both applaud and support. And you can imagine that working across the jurisdictions makes it even more fraught.

Turning to the new criminal organisation and association offences, these are new offences that target persons involved in serious and organised crime. This measure affects the Criminal Code Act 1995. These amendments implement the resolutions agreed to by SCAG on the dates that I mentioned earlier. They also introduce new offences that criminalise associating with persons involved in organised criminal activity and as well as those who support or commit crimes for or direct the activities of a criminal organisation. These amendments also facilitate greater access to telecommunications interception powers for the investigation of the new offences. I know there are appropriate controls in place around that for law enforcement agencies to be able to do what they need to do but equally for the liberties of the community at large.

Regarding the money-laundering and bribery and drug importation offences, the bill enhances—that means strengthens—the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute money-laundering offences. This relates to Criminal Code division 400. These amendments are intended to address problems that were previously identified by the Australian Federal Police. In particular, it extends the geographical jurisdiction of those offences. It also removes limitations on the scope of the offences to enable them to apply to the full extent of the Commonwealth’s constitutional power in this area. It also increases the penalties for bribing a foreign public official—again, this amends the Criminal Code; I alluded to this earlier—and the bribery of a Commonwealth public official. It can be challenging. Foreign public officials can sometimes come under great pressure in this area, but the increased...
penalties should make them think twice about being involved in such activities.

Further, the bill extends the definition of ‘import’ so that it includes dealing with a substance in connection with its importation. That will affect division 91 of the Criminal Code, relating to serious drug offences. That amendment ensures that the Commonwealth drug importation offences cover the full range of criminal conduct covered by the previous drug importation offences in the Customs Act 1901. The aim is to put it beyond doubt in that area.

Regarding the search related amendments, the bill allows material seized under the search and document production powers in the Crimes Act 1914 to be used by and shared between Commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies. We are advised that this is necessary for the proper investigation of offences which cross jurisdictional boundaries. That just makes sense because organised crime does not stop at the border—it does not stop when I go over the Queensland border, where I live. I am getting into your territory, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott! It makes sense that seized material should be able to be treated that way. It introduces portability, if you like.

Regarding criminal assets confiscation and anti-money-laundering provisions, the bill amends the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to strengthen the whole Commonwealth criminal assets confiscation regime. This was deemed necessary. These amendments are in response to the recommendations of law enforcement agencies. Also, in 2002 an independent review of the operation of the Proceeds of Crimes Act was done by Mr Tom Sherman AO, who is well known in this place. The report of that review was tabled in parliament in October 2006.

The amendments will do a number of things. They will expand and clarify the definitions used in the act. They will ensure the correct calculation of pecuniary penalty orders. They will address technical recommendations on the admission of evidence in this area. They will clarify the operation of orders ancillary to restraining orders. All of this makes sense. We are advised that we need to have the act as strong as is necessary but also fair, particularly strengthening the protections for third parties, which is an important provision that is included.

The bill also addresses some issues identified by AUSTRAC, which is our anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing regulator, for when it takes enforcement action against reporting entities that do not comply with their obligations under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006. The Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act is a domestic act but it arises out of one of the 13 international terrorism conventions that we have an obligation to respond to as a result of Security Council resolutions. The act, being consistent with that convention, is an important part of our response nationally and also regionally internationally to terrorism in this area.

The bill amends the act of 2002 to enhance the Australian Crime Commission’s powers to deal with uncooperative witnesses—and I imagine that in this regard there might be a few. It also reinstates procedural requirements for issuing summonses and notices to produce and requires regular independent review of the ACC. That is an important provision because on one hand we are giving wide-ranging powers—which are
deemed necessary by the Attorney-General and by SCAG, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General—but on the other hand it is important that there is some independent review of the exercise of those powers. That is just part and parcel of the rule of law society that we live in. I feel quite satisfied that that provision is in there.

Another important provision is that the bill makes what I am told is an urgent amendment that is required to the Crimes Act to ensure that federal defendants in Victoria can continue to appeal a finding that they are unfit to plead. This addresses Victorian legislation to take effect from October 2009. This was one area that I had discussions with the Attorney-General about, and I know that it was necessary to have that included in the bill.

In closing, I am happy to have spoken in support of this bill. It is important that we continue to do what we can to tackle organised crime. It is a blight on our society. It is a huge cost, and that $15 billion—which is a conservative estimate—that it costs each year is something that we cannot afford to treat lightly. I thank the Attorney-General for the detailed discussions that we were able to have on this bill and for taking on board some of the comments and feedback.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (6.34 pm)—in reply—I thank members for their contribution to the debate, and indeed all members of the opposition. As all speakers have indicated, organised crime is a very serious matter for this parliament to address. Indeed, in his national security statement last November the Prime Minister elevated this issue to a national security concern. Organised crime costs the community in the order of $15 billion a year. That is an imprecise figure, but by way of comparison the entirety of work undertaken by each and every legal firm in Australia, including government legal services, totals about $12 billion, so it is estimated that the cost of organised crime exceeds the amount provided by very substantial infrastructure. From that $15 billion taxpayers, of course, see no tax revenue, which means that resources are diverted from education, health, law and order—you name it in terms of the worthwhile things that state and territory governments do. Taxation is not received from that illicit activity.

Organised crime affects every person in Australia, whether it is concerns about safety on the streets, whether it is concerns about your car being stolen from your garage for rebirthing exercises or operations, whether it is concerns about your children becoming embroiled in violence—and we saw that earlier in the year at Sydney airport—or whether it is concerns about your children being exposed to illicit drugs. Organised crime is behind those impacts on Australians in their everyday lives. Organised crime can also ultimately distort confidence in our democratic institutions. While I think it is fair to say in Australia they are robust at all levels of government, that can certainly have an impact in our neighbouring countries where there are a number of pressures on the institutions of governance. Most certainly organised crime seeks, as one of its modes of operation, to infiltrate not only law enforcement organisations but also other government bodies. Whether they are involved in planning or approvals or development and so forth, they are attractive targets for organised crime to infiltrate, so it can potentially, over time, distort confidence in our democratic institutions.

From an economic point of view, organised crime also seeks to infiltrate areas of critical infrastructure—ports and airports being major areas for that. There is also evidence that organised crime seeks to infiltrate and operate alongside legitimate enterprises,
indeed engaging some of the best professional advice to ensure its affairs are intertwined with legitimate industry. In those cases, it can place a real and significant barrier on the effective operation of the markets in those industries, making it very difficult for legitimate and decent businesses to remain profitable. So, for a number of reasons, organised crime is a very serious issue that needs to be addressed by taking, frankly, severe measures.

The spirit of the debate was constructive. The member for Farrer raised concerns and noted concerns that had been raised by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in its report on this bill. I thank the committee for its work and the seven recommendations. The government will carefully consider those recommendations in terms of the further progress of the bill. Just addressing some of those matters, however, the first was with respect to safeguards for association offences and search related amendments. I note that concerns were raised by the member for Farrer in particular in relation to the criminal organisation and association offences, the search related amendments and the Australian Crime Commission amendments in the bill.

The bill contains a number of safeguards, however, to address those concerns. Firstly, with respect to the association and criminal organisation offences, the offences articulate clear boundaries of criminal liability by requiring proof by the prosecution of certain specific elements. The offences require proof that the offender was aware of a substantial risk that their conduct would facilitate serious and organised crime. The offences criminalise varying levels of involvement in a criminal organisation and carry penalties reflecting the spectrum of seriousness, from supporting conduct to more serious conduct of directing the affairs of the organisations. Defences will also apply to ensure legitimate associations are protected.

In terms of the search related amendments, the provisions in the bill comprehensively set out the uses that can be made of seized material. The provisions in the bill also ensure that compensation is available where damage is caused to electronic equipment or data following the equipment being operated on or away from the warrant premises. It must be appreciated that having access to electronic material is vital in combating organised crime because so much of the communication these days is via electronic means. The member for Farrer suggested data on searched premises should only be able to be copied if there are reasonable grounds to believe it constitutes evidential material. I would note that the bill will lower the threshold to ‘reasonable grounds’ to suspect. Lowering this threshold, we believe, is appropriate because the threshold for seizing a thing under a warrant is a belief, so it is appropriate that a lower threshold applies to copy data for further examination and also that in many circumstances an officer will not be able to form a belief as to whether all data constitutes evidential material—for example, when material is in a foreign language or where large amounts of data are stored on an electronic device. While officers are versed in the relevant law, clearly they do not have a representative of the Director of Public Prosecutions accompanying them on each and every entry pursuant to a warrant. This amendment will also benefit occupiers as it will allow them to keep possession of the electronic device. In addition, the copied data must be destroyed as soon as it is determined that it is not required.

A range of other safeguards are included in the bill. For instance, with respect to the Australian Crime Commission contempt powers, it is the court and not an examiner that determines whether a person is in con-
tempt of the Australian Crime Commission. The court will determine whether a person is in contempt through its normal procedures for dealing with contemptuous behaviour. There are a range of procedural requirements that must be met before an examiner can refer a person to a court for contempt proceedings. These include provisions ensuring that the person has adequate notice of the basis upon which they are alleged to be in contempt of the Australian Crime Commission. A person cannot be punished for their conduct by contempt proceedings and criminal offences: the principle of double jeopardy will apply to prevent that. While an examiner can direct a constable to detain a person alleged to be in contempt of the Australian Crime Commission, there are requirements that the person be brought before the court as soon as is practicable.

More generally, as members know, serious and organised crime, as I have indicated at the outset, is a very serious threat to the community, business and government. It is vital that we take further decisive action to target organised crime and enhance the security of the Australian community. This bill implements resolutions agreed by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in April and August 2009 for a comprehensive national response to organised crime, and I thank the Attorneys of the states and territories for their assistance in these matters. It also builds on the first package of reforms that I introduced into the House in June 2009 and were passed in this House two nights ago and further strengthens the laws necessary to combat organised crime.

The measures in the bill focus upon enabling more effective prosecution of organised crime through new criminal organisation offences; enhanced money-laundering, bribery and drug importation offences; and strengthened investigative and criminal asset confiscation powers to assist in the detection and disruption of organised criminal activity. In particular, the enhancements to the investigative powers will better enable law enforcement agencies to examine and search electronic equipment and will permit greater sharing of seized material between Commonwealth, state and territory agencies. They will also improve the operation and accountability of the Australian Crime Commission and, further, will improve the operation of the National Witness Protection Program. While the bill contains these important measures to combat organised crime, it also contains appropriately strong safeguards to ensure accountability and to protect procedural fairness and natural justice.

I would like to thank the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for its detailed consideration of the bill. The government will carefully consider the Senate committee’s report and, as I have indicated, respond to its seven recommendations. The measures in the bill represent another significant step in a coordinated national effort to more effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute organised crime activities and to improve laws that target the proceeds of organised crime.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (6.46 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
ACCESS TO JUSTICE (CIVIL LITIGATION REFORMS) AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Consideration of Senate Message
Consideration resumed from 27 October.

Senate’s amendments—

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (at the end of the table), add:

4. Schedule 4 The 28th day after the day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.

(2) Schedule 2, item 13, page 10 (lines 27 and 28), omit paragraph (1AA)(c).

(3) Schedule 2, item 32, page 14 (lines 8 and 9), omit paragraph (4A)(c).

(4) Schedule 2, item 32, page 14 (lines 20 and 21), omit paragraph (4B)(d).

(5) Page 22 (after line 23), at the end of the bill, add:

| Schedule 4—Appointment of Federal Court Judges to State Supreme Courts |
| Federal Court of Australia Act 1976 |
| 1 Subsection 6(7) (at the end of the definition of prescribed court) |
| Add: |
| ; or (d) the Supreme Court of a State. |

(6) Page 22 (after line 23), at the end of the bill, add:

| Schedule 5—Registries |
| Federal Court of Australia Act 1976 |
| 1 At the end of section 34 |
| Add: |
| (3) The Registrar shall cause at least one Registry in each State to be staffed on a full-time basis with the complement of staff in each such Registry to include a full-time Registrar. |

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (6.47 pm)—I would like to indicate to the House that the government proposes that amendments (1) to (5) be agreed to and that amendment (6) be disagreed to and an amendment be made in place of it. I suggest, therefore, that it may suit the convenience of the House first to consider amendments (1) to (5) and, when those amendments have been disposed of, to consider amendment (6). I move:

That Senate amendments (1) to (5) be agreed to.

The government is committed to achieving an effective and affordable civil justice system which will improve access to justice for all Australians. The Access to Justice (Civil Litigation Reforms) Amendment Bill 2009 introduces important reforms to the case management powers of the Federal Court aimed at reducing unnecessary delay and time spent in court. Government amendments to the bill were agreed to in the Senate.

Amendments to schedule 2 to the bill were agreed to. Schedule 2 contains amendments which provide for more streamlined appeals pathways to reduce confusion for litigants and aid the Federal Court of Australia in the efficient management of its resources.

Amendments to insert a new schedule 4 into the bill were also agreed to. Schedule 4 clarifies that a judge of the Federal Court of Australia other than the Chief Justice may hold a concurrent appointment as a judge of one or more state supreme courts. The amendments to schedule 2 of the bill implement a recommendation from the recent report on the bill by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Recommendation 2 of the Senate report recommended that proposed paragraph 24(1AA)(c) be deleted from schedule 2 of the bill so that interlocutory decisions relating to security for payment of costs by a single Federal Court judge can continue to be appealed to the full Federal Court, introducing a level of accountability.
In submissions to the Senate committee, the Law Council of Australia and the Australian Network of Environmental Defender’s Offices strongly supported retaining the right to appeal for security of costs decisions. This is based on the view that the removal of this right of appeal could effectively stifle litigation, as parties would be taking a large financial risk irrespective of the merits of the case. Security of costs enables parties to determine whether there will be some capacity to recover costs if they decide to proceed with or defend litigation. The government accepts the view in the Senate committee report that removing the right to appeal interlocutory decisions relating to security of payment of costs by a single court judge could have the unintended consequence of limiting access to justice for some litigants.

I note for the House that the requirement to seek leave to appeal these decisions under section 24(1)(a) of the Federal Court of Australia Act enables the Federal Court to manage any potential delays caused by appeals against such interlocutory decisions relating to security for the payment of costs by a single Federal Court judge. Although not specifically referred to by the Senate committee or the Law Council of Australia, the government also proposes that for consistency similar paragraphs 33(4A)(c) and 33(4B)(d) also be deleted. These paragraphs provide for no avenue of appeal to the High Court for decisions relating to security of costs when made by a full court exercising original jurisdiction or when made by a single judge or a full court in the appellate jurisdiction, respectively. The deletion of these paragraphs will continue current arrangements and ensure that security for costs orders will continue to be appealable.

New schedule 4 to the bill clarifies that a judge of the Federal Court of Australia other than the chief justice may hold a concurrent appointment as a judge of one or more state supreme courts. The amendment is not controversial or complex. It will involve amending section 6 of the Federal Court of Australia Act to include ‘the Supreme Court of a state’ within the definition of ‘prescribed court’.

In March 2008, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General first agreed to the development of an exchange program between judicial officers of interested jurisdictions. The Federal Court act does not currently preclude the appointment of Federal Court judges to state courts. The amendment will encourage existing arrangements for the temporary transfers of Federal Court judges to state supreme courts. The government expects that the transfer of the Federal Court judges to hear matters in superior state courts will enhance the knowledge and experience of Federal Court judges, benefit other jurisdictions with new ideas and improvements to their courts, and result in a more consistent body of national decision-making in areas of common jurisdiction. (Extension of time granted) The government expects that the transfer of Federal Court judges to hear matters in superior courts, as I have indicated, will assist in the development of greater national uniformity. The amendment demonstrates the Rudd government’s commitment to working with the states and territories in pursuing court excellence on a national basis.

Question agreed to.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (6.54 pm)—I present a supplementary explanatory memorandum to the bill and I move:

That Senate amendment (6) be disagreed to and the following Government amendment be made in place of it:

(1) Page 22 (after line 23), at the end of the Bill (after proposed Schedule 4), add:

Schedule 5—Registries

Federal Court of Australia Act 1976
1 At the end of section 34
Add:

(3) The Registrar must ensure that at least one Registry in each State is staffed appropriately to discharge the functions of a District Registry, with the staff to include a District Registrar in that State.

The government does not accept the amendment which was introduced by the Greens and supported by the coalition in the Senate. That amendment did result in some delay to the bill. I recognise that the Federal Court’s decision to transfer the responsibilities of the Tasmanian district registrar to the district registrar for Victoria was an important issue and an issue that concerned the people of Tasmania—and it had vigorous advocacy by members of the Tasmanian legal profession. However, the government cannot support the proposed amendment and is instead moving an alternative amendment in order to facilitate the passage of the bill.

The Courts and Tribunals Administration Amendment Act 1989 granted self-administration to the Federal Court, the Family Court and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. In the second reading of the bill, the then Attorney-General, the Hon. Lionel Bowen, explained that the bill would give the courts responsibility for the supervision of their own financial management and practices, and control over the management of their administrative affairs. The then Attorney-General went on to explain that self-management would ensure the courts are free to make their own decisions and maximise their flexibility to cope with the changing pressures and priority throughout each year. However, he noted that the courts and tribunals, no less than other areas of public administration, must be accountable for efficiency in the management of their affairs. It is now, rightly, accepted that responsibility for the administration and management of the federal courts properly lies with the courts themselves.

The amendment moved in the Senate by the Greens and supported by the coalition, the government believed, inappropriately restricted or would restrict if enacted the Federal Court’s capacity to independently and efficiently manage its own affairs. It would have compelled the retention of a specific full-time position in each and every state registry without regard to actual needs, which might vary between registries over time. All areas of government are being asked to find efficiencies, and I have encouraged and will continue to encourage the federal courts, given their importance as an independent arm of government, to increase efficiency while maintaining service delivery.

Additionally, a significant unintended consequence would be caused by the use of the term ‘full time’. Those opposite should be mindful that the requirement to work full-time may exclude some applicants with families or other carer responsibilities and may also exclude some applicants with a disability. The government believes this is out of step with the government’s commitment to social inclusion and the policies which underpin federal antidiscrimination laws, such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. On those bases the government opposes the amendment in its current form.

I have sought assurances from the Chief Justice of the Federal Court that the standard of legal services offered by the court in Tasmania will not be reduced. From the outset, Chief Justice Black has assured me that the Federal Court’s review of the best structures for its Tasmanian registry will not reduce the quality of legal services provided in Tasmania. Indeed, in his letter tabled in the Senate on 7 September 2009, the chief justice as-
sured senators that all judge delegated work and mediations associated with matters filed in the Tasmanian district registry will continue to take place in Tasmania, and we believe that is an important assurance. It means that litigants or lawyers will not be required to travel outside Tasmania to conduct their Federal Court matters. Put simply, the government accepts the court’s assurance that it is committed to ensuring that all matters filed within the Tasmanian district registry will continue to be dealt with promptly, effectively and to the highest standard.

As the bill forms a key part of the Rudd government’s agenda to improve access to justice, I am keen to ensure that the bill can pass as soon as possible. Therefore, in order to facilitate the passage of the bill, I have moved an alternative amendment to section 34 of the Federal Court Act which provides, as indicated:

The Registrar must ensure that at least one Registry in each State is staffed appropriately to discharge the functions of a District Registry, with the staff to include a District Registrar in that State.

It ensures that each state will have an appropriately staffed federal registry while maintaining the flexibility of the court to manage its affairs.

Question agreed to.

**HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (VET FEE-HELP AND TERTIARY ADMISSION CENTRES) BILL 2009**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 9 September, on motion by Mr Marles:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (7.00 pm)—This is a straightforward bill, the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP and Tertiary Admission Centres) Bill 2009, which the opposition will be supporting. In fact we have spoken to this bill earlier when it was part of a bill to reintroduce compulsory student unionism and at that time I did indicate that we supported those sections of the bill which related to the broadening of the definition of students who would be able to receive VET-FEE HELP.

VET-FEE HELP was introduced by the former coalition government in 2007 and it was in 2007 that VET-FEE HELP was extended for the first time to the VET sector. It was principally for students undertaking full-fee courses in diploma, advanced diploma, graduate diploma and graduate certificates. It was at bodies which were corporate bodies and which had in place credit transfer arrangements for higher education. Prior to this the VET sector was the only sector offering post-secondary qualifications without fee help. The coalition recognised that students seeking an education in VET did not receive the same level of financial support as those seeking an education at university.

In August 2008, as part of the Victorian state government’s move to a demand-driven skills and training system, the federal government announced the extension of income-contingent loans to the Victorian VET sector and at that time the opposition, both myself and the shadow minister for education, at that time the member for Casey, indicated our support for that extension of income-contingent loans. So the opposition position has been laid out there from August last year.

The TAFE future survey in 2006 indicated that fees present a major deterrent particularly for those living in areas with a high dependence on social security and in low-paid jobs. VET-FEE HELP increased the accessibility to vocational education and training for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who otherwise may not
have been able to afford to undertake these studies.

This legislation allows for a broadening of the students who will be able to receive VET-FEE HELP. For the first time it will be extended to government subsidised students who are studying for a diploma or advanced diploma. At this stage it applies specifically only to VET reform states or territories, and at present there is only one, and that is Victoria. There is provision there for other states, should they go down the same pathway that Victoria has gone down in the vocational education and training sector, to gain access to this, but at the moment the costings are there for $5 million over the next two years and then there is a return after that. The opposition recognises the importance of VET qualifications and believes that these qualifications deserve the same status as a university degree.

In the budget reply speech this year the Leader of the Opposition outlined our proposal to bring forward the incentives for apprentices in the area of traditional trades. By bringing forward the incentives to a time when apprentices are generally less productive, it gives a clear financial incentive for businesses and helps them retain staff when finances are tight. That is why, when the government recently announced its proposals for KickStart apprentices, again focused on trade apprentices and also on bringing forward the incentives to commencement, the opposition supported it. We thought that was very similar to the idea that we proposed in the budget in May.

We need as a country a multifaceted approach to boost enrolments in traditional trades and areas of skill shortage, especially as the Australian economy enters recovery. That is why the previous government established the Australian Technical Colleges. The idea was to have centres for excellence for VET in schools. It combined a pathway to complete year 12 certificate III, a school based apprenticeship, and a very big employer-industry input into the direction of the school. We thought that was very much the direction to go to concentrate the effort. VET training is very expensive and it made very good sense to concentrate that effort. So the Australian Technical Colleges were set up with industry, ensuring that the needs of employers were taken into account in the development of curriculum and training of the future workforce.

Unfortunately, the government did not share our vision. They have ceased funding the Australian Technical Colleges as of the end of this year, throwing the education of many students into turmoil. For example, there is the Australian Technical College in Northern Tasmania and the Australian Technical College in Spencer Gulf. Both have no certainties about their future, both are looking at closing at the end of the year, and both have seen a very significant number of school based apprentices on those campuses.

It is absolutely critical as the economy recovers that we do see strong enrolments in VET courses and in apprenticeships as well. That is why we proposed in the budget bringing forward the incentives for apprentices in traditional trades. As the economy recovers it is likely that we will see skill shortages in a whole range of areas—in electrical, in automotive, carpentry and mining—and it is absolutely critical that we encourage participation in these areas of skill shortages now.

The second part of the legislation has some amendments which deal with tertiary admission centres and will see tertiary admission centres to have the same status and duty of care as officers of a higher education provider and a VET provider in relation to the processing of students’ personal informa-
tion. Tertiary admission centres allow for the streamlining of applications by potential students to higher education institutions and it is vital that they adhere to stringent guidelines in the processing and handling of personal information.

That is the opposition’s point of view. This is a straightforward piece of legislation. We do support the extension of income-contingent loans, in this case to Victoria, and any other states or territories that go down that track. We would be very interested in watching the progress of the reforms in Victoria as well. The amendments which relate to the tertiary admission centres are ones which we think are necessary.

Mr RAGUSE (Forde) (7.08 pm)—I certainly acknowledge the contribution of the member for Boothby and the bipartisan approach to this particular piece of legislation with all these amendments. I rise to speak in support of the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP and Tertiary Admission Centres) Bill 2009. The bill before us today seeks amendments in two areas of the Higher Education Support Act 2003. The two amendments seek to expand the VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme and amend the functions of tertiary admission centres. As the member for Boothby well explained, the changes—and the continuation of a number of parts of the framework—are to what we understand very well as the vocational education and training system, and they put in context the better known and historical aspects of the TAFE system of technical and further education. Labor governments for many generations, certainly from the Whitlam years, always looked at vocational education and training and the better ways of enhancing that approach.

VET FEE-HELP is a loan scheme to assist vocational education and training students with their tuition fee expenses. VET FEE-HELP allows students to defer their fee expenses until they are earning a reasonable income of at least $43,150 for the financial year 2009-10. Schedule I of the bill broadens VET FEE-HELP eligibility by allowing lower debt amounts to apply to classes of students and to allow VET credit transfer requirement matters to be dealt with within the guidelines. These changes will allow VET FEE-HELP to be made available to more training organisations and state government subsidised students. As the member for Boothby mentioned, this is about VET reform states—states which take the commitment. At the moment Victoria is progressing that way but certainly the framework is there for other states to come on board. Schedule II of the bill makes technical amendments to allow a better flow of personal information between tertiary admission centres and other educational entities. This is to be achieved by amending the act to give tertiary admission centres the same status and duty of care in dealing with personal information as officers of a higher education provider and VET provider. These changes are to ensure that education authorities can share relevant information. The privacy and rights of students remain protected by the privacy requirements and provisions of the act.

What is significant about this bill and the continuation of the framework is that it gives increased recognition, certainly for the vocational education and training sector. As I said before, it enhances the technical and further education system and many of the TAFE colleges. This harks back, of course, to the same sort of ideology that Labor governments have had for many years, in fact since the Whitlam government. I have mentioned before in this House the considerable changes that a former Whitlam education minister, Kim Beazley senior, whom we know very well, brought to skills training
and to vocational education and training. A senior public servant at that time, Myer Kan-
gan, set out to produce a report that would look at the delivery of technical skills
through different agencies. It was clear in the very beginning that coordination—the very
things that we talk about today—brings in a system. At that time the system was called
‘technical and further education’—the sys-

tem we know today as TAFE.

That has been further enhanced with our understanding of the vocational education
and training system, or the VET system. Over the last two decades there has been a
move towards other private providers and registered training organisations which can
actually work in that space of technical and further education. It is of personal interest to
me, of course, because for 10 years of my working life I was a TAFE teacher, lecturer
and TAFE college director. I had a lot to do with a lot of the changes and enhancements
to our training system and coordinating a national training approach to skills and the
way we credential skills. Not so many years ago an electrician who gained training in
Queensland might not have been able to operate in Victoria or Western Australia be-
cause of the differences of not only the training regime but also the certification that went
with that. Those times are long past. The establishment of the Australian National
Training Authority in the Keating years was very much about setting that framework in
place. As the member for Boothby well rec-
ognised, during their time in government they recognised that TAFE and the VET sys-
tem were important frameworks in establish-

Bipartisan support exists in this area, and it is critical that it exists because over 30-odd
years from the time that the Kangan report
was tabled and the TAFE system was born
we still today need to continue to work to-

The nationalisation of most of our
training systems—but particularly the TAFE
system, which, as the member for Boothby
pointed out, is so important—means that we
have a strong skills base and that people
have the opportunity to gain not only higher
educational qualifications through university
but certainly the vocational skills that quite
often enhance the training that they already
have. In fact, only today in a related area of
education I spoke about this very thing—that
not so many years ago a person could engage
in a course of academic study and not neces-
sarily gain the empirical skills that someone
might need to provide a certain activity on
the ground.

I had a strong involvement in helping to
understand that reverse articulation. Most
organisations now accept articulation, certi-
fication and the recognition of skills across
not only different state jurisdictions but dif-
ferent educational institutions. This very bill
does talk about the need for a number of re-
quirements—certainly articulation and re-
verse articulation—in those programs. The
fact is that not so many years ago a certifi-
cate course in Queensland, whether or not it
was seen as what we understand now as a
cert I to a cert IV, might have been com-
pletely different from the sort of training that
you might see in another state.

That national framework was very impor-
tant; the processes of ANTA were very im-
portant. But one problem, one difficulty that
existed was that the funding for students in
the VET sector did not match those opportu-
nities that had been established in the univer-
sity sector. So the Whitlam era brought in
access to a university education, the devel-
opment of the TAFE system. At a later time,
the introduction of a HECS fee system al-
lowed students to access educational oppor-
tunities and take a loan and pay those fees at
a later date when they were earning certain
levels of income. That was all very impor-

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tant in continuing to enhance the TAFE system.

I will give you an example of how important it has been to the development of new industries in this country. I reflect on my involvement in the media and the new media industries, which we all understand today as being multimedia. Back in the early nineties most of the skills training did not exist in this country. We had the opportunity to enter that new world of the internet and multimedia, which we understand as being everyday—accessing computing systems and using browsers and using different software to access different programs and opportunities—but the reality is that in this country back then we had very limited knowledge or ability of how we would create the content. I reflect on a story. When Keating announced the Creative Nation strategy, that was very much built on a visit by Bill Gates to this country when we were boasting of opportunities that we were putting in place with the development of Optus and the laying of fibre-optic cable. That is a very relevant discussion these days but this is back in the early nineties, when this infrastructure was being built. Bill Gates, who was observing this, said: ‘This is very good, but what are you going to put down those lines? What are you going to run along those data lines?’ Of course it was clear that content was something we did not have or did not have the ability of in this country.

The point I am making here is that the development of new industries and the opportunities that exist through training and the new media—what we call now the multimedia industry—were born at that time simply because there was a desire and a need and an opportunity to build a new industry, but through training. That was also enhanced by the understanding that if we were going to have a national approach to multimedia, or new media at the time, then we had to have qualifications that reflected the same things. I remember well that the then Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, suggested that Victoria would be the multimedia capital of Australia. It was great in a statement, but dare I say, being a parochial Queenslander, we did it first. The very first educational programs in multimedia, the first higher post-secondary qualifications in vocational ed and the certificates and advanced certificates and diplomas were developed in Queensland, and then the articulation to those university programs.

The point I am making is that these all go together, these parts all come together to enhance our vocational education and training system. The reality is that we must continue to work towards giving opportunities to students to access this type of training. The choice that many students make is certainly an academic path, but, as we know, during the period leading up to the financial issues we have had a huge skills deficit. In fact, we currently have a skills deficit in this country, and so the vocational education and training system is the place and is the means by which we can finally provide well-trained graduates who then can go out and build our infrastructure in the way that the community demands.

As I said, wonderful opportunities have been advanced by technology, but also by our ability as a country to see an opportunity, and through the TAFE system. Through this bill, which enhances the opportunity and access for students, they can take loans and have an opportunity to study and take that career path which may end up ultimately a combination of vocational skills and also academic skills.

This has also had a lot to do with the very current debate around international students and the international programs that we run. Students who come to this country are study-
ing not only in the university sector but right throughout our vocational education and training system. We talk often in this House about the issues and some of the problems that exist in maintaining a quality system for international students. The reality is that it is a $15 billion industry that is built on the back of our ability to develop a credential system. It is all about having developed a credential system that would give students who accessed education in Australia a qualification that was matched against a quality framework. This is something that does not exist in many other countries in the world. The approach that was taken during the Whitlam years, the development of a vocational education system, TAFE as we know it and the continuation to have easy articulation into university programs is all very much about that program of training and support.

In conclusion, the federal government is supporting students seeking vocational education and training. The VET options provide students with important career progression pathways, as I have explained, and the VET FEE-HELP is expanded to additional training organisations and state government subsidised students. This bill allows the better flow of student information between education authorities within strict privacy guidelines, and of course further opens up the training market to both government and private sector training organisations in the pursuit of quality outcomes for not only our students in this country but also those international students who pay high fees to come and gain a qualification from this country. For those reasons, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (7.21 pm)—I rise tonight to support the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET FEE-HELP and Tertiary Admission Centres) Bill 2009. In a previous occupation before I came here I was heavily involved in vocational education and training, and I understand the importance of that, particularly in rural electorates such as mine. In speaking on this bill tonight I would like to highlight some of the flaws that exist in the application of the bill in the hope that by putting this on record the department and the minister may be able to iron out some of the problems that are affecting one training organisation in my electorate.

Since opening its doors in Dubbo in 2006, the Advanced Massage College of Australia has provided a variety of professional courses in the field of massage therapy. The college, and the courses it provided, are somewhat unique to western New South Wales and as such the college has consistently attracted a large number of applicants. In fact, in only a few short years the college’s reputation has grown to the point where a number of its students have relocated to Dubbo from throughout New South Wales to study there.

The owner-director of the Advanced Massage College of Australia, Mr Claude Phillips, has had significant difficulties in accessing the VET-FEE HELP and obtaining a credit transfer agreement for a diploma course at the college. Mr Phillips applied for VET funding on 13 May 2009 but, despite repeated representations to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister Gillard, Mr Phillips is still unclear as to why these difficulties have arisen.

Mr Phillips’s confusion about his situation increased when it was brought to his attention that a very similar organisation in Western Australia, offering a very similar course, was granted VET-FEE HELP funding based on exactly the same criteria as presented by the Advanced Massage College of Australia. There seems to be widespread confusion among many such organisations, particularly in regard to the VET credit transfer arrange-
ment, because VET-FEE HELP has been granted to a number of colleges based on the guidelines laid out in the Australian Qualifications Training Framework Health Training Package, but not to others who are in a very similar situation.

During Senate estimates, a manager from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations clarified the situation somewhat and said the Perth college has a valid credit transfer agreement endorsed by a higher education provider that has been assessed by the department to be compliant with the requirements of the act and the credit transfer part of their application was approved on that basis. The manager explained that the Dubbo college has sought to get that same agreement from Charles Sturt University, which has a campus in Dubbo, as well as several other higher education providers, but has been unable to have a higher education provider endorse that same level of credit transfer for the course he is delivering.

The department was able to do little more than recommend other local higher education providers to try and arrange a credit transfer with them. In regional New South Wales this is very difficult for a variety of reasons, but mainly because there are far fewer options for providers like Mr Phillips. Another reason he has been unsuccessful is because higher education providers such as Charles Sturt University require more credit points, which Mr Phillips believes is a significant flaw in the design of the Australian Qualifications Training Framework Health Training Package, which outlines the benchmark standard for all such colleges to use and follow.

During the course of this funding battle, Mr Phillips has not been able to take on a single student. In 2009, not one student has been or will be accepted to the college, because the students who applied to study remedial massage cannot afford the cost of the course without financial assistance. Over the past four years the college has carried the burden of the financial strain for all students by allowing them to pay what they can. However, the lingering effects of the drought combined with the current economic downturn means that the college is unable to do this any longer. Without VET-FEE HELP the college fears that they will not be able to take in any students in 2010 as well. There are 70 students currently waiting to enrol to study at the Advanced Massage College of Australia and, unless VET-FEE HELP is provided, those 70 students will be turned away.

VET-FEE HELP is an invaluable tool in my electorate in helping address the skills shortages that are increasingly becoming part and parcel of life in regional Australia. However, it is my belief that the processes in which this legislation is applied may need to be altered so that situations such as the one faced by the Advanced Massage College of Australia do not occur in the future.

Mr SULLIVAN (Longman) (7.25 pm)—I rise to support the Higher Education Support Amendment (VET-FEE-HELP and Tertiary Admission Centres) Bill 2009 before the House today. I will make some comments in a moment which may assist the member for Parkes, so I hope that he takes the time to read them tomorrow. It is frustrating on the one hand that we have so much legislation in this term of our government coming back to us from the Senate and having to be rejigged in the face of opposition from the coalition parties in the Senate. However, on this occasion I am relatively pleased, because it will give me an opportunity to speak on education matters within my electorate, which, because of the number of people who wanted to talk about the bill back in February, I was not able to do. So in that regard I am fairly pleased.
The two things that this legislation does is provide that personnel officers working for the tertiary admissions centres are covered by the same privacy arrangements as all other officers working in the higher education, vocational education and departmental area in relation to the privacy issues, and that information will be able to flow between them easily because of that. It is a super sensible idea. It is hard to understand why it needed to be done at this time. It is something that I cannot imagine has not caused difficulties for a long time, and it was an easy change to make.

The other aspects of this legislation are the changes to the manner in which VET-FEE HELP will operate in what are called reform states or territories. In this instance the only reform state or territory we have is Victoria. Were New South Wales to be granted the status of a reform state or territory, the problems that the member for Parkes has just outlined in relation to the Advanced Massage College of Australia in Dubbo would go away. The answer here is not that we need necessarily to lower the bar in terms of transfer credits—or articulation, as an earlier speaker had called it—but that we need to encourage New South Wales to look at their vocational education and training sector and to make the sorts of moves that have been made in Victoria. Once they have done that, the problems in New South Wales will go away.

I encourage not only New South Wales but my own state of Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania—I encourage them all—to get on board with these new status requirements. I just want to read out what is required. I will not read it out in full but read from what is required to be given the status of a reform state or territory. Basically client choice will determine where government funding goes—the funding follows the client; information and facilitation for individuals and businesses be provided so that they can comprehensively be informed about the training providers that are available; eligible students should receive some state government support; purchasers are not motivated to choose any particular provider but to choose a provider on the basis of quality, price and their individual choice; quality assurance; and all public funds for the delivery of training within the state or territory be open to all registered training organisations with registration within that jurisdiction.

In Victoria what this means is that students studying advanced diploma or diploma level courses that do not have credit transfer systems or articulations are able to get VET-FEE HELP—

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being 7.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Gilmore Electorate: Hospitals

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (7.30 pm)—The following is a letter from one of my constituents, Bianca, from Batemans Bay, and it will illustrate why I was so anxious to get the Prime Minister to visit Gilmore and inspect the Shoalhaven and Batemans Bay hospitals.

My constituent’s letter is in reference to Batemans Bay hospital and it reads:

My husband started to have severe chest and abdominal pains late last night.

However he felt reluctant to attend the Bay’s emergency department after hearing bad stories about it, (which given we have only been here 5 weeks is sad in itself).

After some time I finally managed to convince him to go.

I had wanted to try to drive to Moruya, however after 5-10 minutes my husband’s pain be-

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came unbearable and he was quickly becoming very distressed.

We had no option but to attend Batemans Bay Hospital.

When we entered the hospital, we sat and waited to be let in for about 10 minutes, however no one came to the front and seemed to not even realize we were there.

I then walked straight in to find my husband pale and panicked.

I would soon realize that no one came because there was no one to come!

What followed over the next 24 hours was nothing short of disgraceful.

We encountered a lost vial of blood, which turned up next to a newborn baby (I can only imagine how her poor parents felt about that).

One doctor and one nurse trying to treat and triage everyone that came in.

We saw patients dismissed, including one with whooping cough, purely for what seemed lack of time to bother.

The story goes on as it is far too long to explain but came to a head when we were told there was no ultrasound machine available at the Bay and my husband would need to be transported with another patient to Moruya for the scan.

Mind you, in an ambulance driven by a man talking on his mobile phone.

I am appalled that any hospital in 2009 and in Australia could be without an ultrasound machine.

Are funds so tight that even vital equipment and staff are sacrificed?

Clearly we can afford to build a fancy new training facility but not afford more important things?

How can we train new practitioners if we don’t even have the money for the basics?

Clearly there are no where near enough staff to man the E.D and I am so sad that a community like this is willing to accept that level of cover.

Well I’m not and although I have no idea what I can do to help, I want to back you in your request for Kevin Rudd to visit the hospital and see first hand what the staff are dealing with and give funding to right the problems!

I have spent the last 12 hours trying to think of possible ways to help the situation and while I am only one person, there must be a way.

I am a mother and need to feel safe. After the last 24 hours I feel far from it.

My apologies for the long email but I feel so upset at the moment, knowing my husband is lying in a hospital bed, in a hospital that is nothing more than a medical centre.

It’s not a good thought.

The Prime Minister did accept my invitation to visit but unfortunately he sent someone else in his place and did not get the chance to see for himself why emails like this arrive on my table. He also missed out on seeing what the hospitals have become after 14 years of incompetent administration by the discredited state Labor government. Furthermore, he missed out on seeing how the Shoalhaven is doomed to the same downhill spiral of neglect without urgent intervention from the federal government.

And just in case anyone thinks I am being over the top, it should be noted that operations have actually had to be cancelled at Shoalhaven hospital in the last week and intensive care patients transferred as far away as Newcastle because a piece of life saving machinery, the hospital’s compressor, which was manufactured in 1958, finally gave up. Here we are dealing with vital equipment that belongs in a museum, not a hospital. The situation is simply not good enough and I, like my constituent Bianca, will not accept it.

I call on the Prime Minister to deliver on his word and see firsthand what I am talking about. Providing the funds for a new compressor in Shoalhaven hospital to put an end to this farce and get our local patients back here would be a good start. It is something the state Labor government should be doing instead of the federal government.
And, Mr Rudd, we will also be putting in a submission to receive one of the ten regional cancer care centres announced in this year’s budget. In light of our considerable need for this facility, our ageing population and the fact that the local community has itself raised almost $1 million and council will provide suitable land to get a linear accelerator locally, I ask you to look on our submission favourably. It is simply unacceptable that cancer sufferers are currently forced to travel to Wollongong, Campbelltown or Sydney in their condition and often by way of a community bus as there is no public transport available and if the train is accessible for some, services are extremely limited and unreliable.

I am very proud of the way in which the entire community has rallied together on this issue. The people of Gilmore, and that is all the community groups without exception, have demonstrated their incredible generosity by raising almost $1 million, which I cannot help but mention again. I think this speaks very loudly and clearly about the widely acknowledged need for this facility in our area.

In closing I would also like to add how wonderful it is to have the cooperation of all levels of government on this matter in Gilmore. Shoalhaven Mayor Paul Green, state member for the South Coast, Shelley Hancock, and I are all working together for the same outcome. (Time expired)

**Lowe Electorate: Livvi’s Place**

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (7.35 pm)—Last Sunday I had the pleasure to attend the official opening of Australia’s first all abilities playground, Livvi’s Place, at Timbrell Park, Five Dock, in my electorate of Lowe. The Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese, also attended to officially open the playground.

The opening was hosted by the City of Canada Bay Council.

Designed by Ben Richards, council’s landscape architect, in consultation with leading academics, play, disability, and landscape experts and the local community, Livvi’s Place Timbrell Park aims to dramatically reduce the barriers experienced by children with special needs and their families, helping to give them a level playing field for life. The playground’s unique design and equipment addresses the needs of children with various forms of disability including mobility, vision and hearing impairment as well as spectrum disorders such as autism.

The City of Canada Bay has worked closely with the community and founding partners, Touched by Olivia and Leighton Contractors, to bring Livvi’s Place to fruition. In 2008 council adopted the Let’s Play strategy. A key aim of Let’s Play is ensuring that local children and families have access to well planned playgrounds that are within reach of everyone in this community. Livvi’s Place at Timbrell Park is an important and impressive benchmark in this approach.

This is a wonderful initiative. I know it will be of immense value to our community and I thank all of those involved for their vision and contribution. The City of Canada Bay Council is well known for its vision and leadership. As a strong supporter of action on climate change, I think it is worth noting that the initiatives that the council has introduced have also been recognised and awarded at state, national and international level. In fact, they have won so many awards in recent times that I cannot mention them all tonight for lack of time—but I will mention some.

At a state level they won the Local Government and Shires Association Excellence in Environment award for various projects including waste management, stormwater and urban waterways and local sustainability.
They also won an award for council’s water saving action plan, the energy saving action plan, council sustainability awards, green business events and a food recycling and processing trial.

At a national level, I am proud to record that Canada Bay was the overall winner of the Keep Australia Beautiful award, which involved various council projects, including the council’s Sustainable City Program and FuturesPlan20—the council’s 20-year sustainable vision for the city that has been developed to ensure our city and its people can respond in a positive and constructive way to the challenges ahead. Other national Keep Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Awards in 2009 included: the Water Conservation Award for the City of Canada Bay’s water savings action plan; the Energy Innovation Award for various council projects, including park solar lighting, sports field lighting management system and energy reduction measures within Concord Library; and the Dame Phyllis Frost Litter Prevention Award for various council projects, including the council’s ‘kNOw waste’ education program for local schools, multiunit dwelling—MUD—waste management guides, and the food recycling and processing trial.

At an international level, Canada Bay has won a gold medal award for Liveable Communities 2009 and various projects involving the enhancement of the landscape, heritage management, environmentally sensitive practices, community sustainability, healthy lifestyles and planning for the future. It also won an international award for environmentally sensitive practices involving the council’s Sustainable City Program, FuturesPlan20 targets, the water savings action plan, waste management and the ‘green’ designed Concord Library.

It is wonderful to see a local government area like Canada Bay working together with the state and federal governments to provide the community with a strong vision for the future and providing important facilities to the residents and ratepayers of the City of Canada Bay. The City of Canada Bay Council has also taken action to address what the overwhelming scientific community recognises as one of the biggest challenges for the future: climate change. Canada Bay takes up a large proportion of my electorate of Lowe. It is home to 140 parks and reserves and many kilometres of accessible public foreshore. Constituents of Canada Bay value the green and open spaces and are committed to partner their council in delivering projects and programs that strive for world’s best practice. I congratulate Mayor Angelo Tsirekas, councillors, general manager Gary Sawyer, staff and of course the community for delivering such a fantastic end result that will benefit so many of my constituents and the broader community for many years to come. Well done, Canada Bay—a most progressive council.

Cowper Electorate: Maclean Bat Colony

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (7.40 pm)—I rise in this adjournment debate to raise a matter of importance to the students of Maclean High School and Maclean TAFE, the surrounding residents and the wider Maclean community. We have a situation where the grounds in and around Maclean High School have been infested by a bat colony. We have a situation where the wellbeing of bats is being put ahead of the health and wellbeing of students, staff and the surrounding residents. We have a situation where it appears that the primary concern of government departments, both state and federal, is the health of bats and the total and wilful neglect of the health of people. Governments, state and federal, owe a duty of care to the students of Maclean High and Maclean TAFE and the residents of the surrounding
The community may well ask who will take responsibility for the health of the students at Maclean High. Is it the state minister for education, is it the director-general for education or is it the federal minister for the environment? Can these ministers and bureaucrats guarantee that the health of students of Maclean High School and Maclean TAFE will not be adversely affected by this unwanted invasion? Can these ministers and bureaucrats guarantee that these students will not contract the Hendra virus or some other animal-borne disease? Why is it that the colony cannot be moved during the breeding season from September to April due to concern about the wellbeing of the bats when the health of our children and the staff of the schools is at risk? What happens to the health of our children between the months of September and April? Why is it that, whilst governments fiddle, a solution is many months if not years away? How is it tolerable that our students are defecated on by bats and how is it tolerable that bat faeces is walked through every classroom in the school? Can the state education department guarantee that the school grounds are a hygienic learning environment when bat faeces is being trodden through every classroom?

I believe that, for the sake of the students and staff and the sake of the surrounding residents, our community can demand that these bats are moved immediately. The risk to students, staff and surrounding residents is just too great. The education department and the minister are grossly negligent for allowing this situation to continue. The federal minister also must act. It is all too easy to provide excuses. If legislation is required, it should be passed without delay. We need an immediate solution, not endless delay. The bureaucrats talk of ‘developing a multistakeholder management strategy for flying foxes’—a very interesting concept. The only strategy that will protect the students is to move the bats, the only strategy that will protect the staff is to move the bats and the only strategy that will protect the residents of the surrounding area is to move the bats. The bureaucrats talk of ‘identifying measures which will reduce conflict between the flying fox camp and school activities’. Well, get rid of the bats. That is the clear message from the students.

The state Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water can issue a certificate to disperse the bats. The federal minister for the environment can then approve a licence for the colony to be relocated. This must occur immediately. I invite Minister Garrett to visit Maclean and see this problem firsthand. The problem may well require special legislation and that should be dealt with by the parliament without delay. We should not have to wait for the death or serious illness of a student before the current ‘Yes, Minister’ approach is ditched in favour of serious action. We spend millions of dollars on preventative health programs each year. Getting rid of the bats is a vitally important preventative measure for the staff and students of Maclean High School and Maclean TAFE and the surrounding residents. For the responsible ministers to continue to fiddle is gross negligence on a grand scale.

Penrith City Wall of Achievement Awards

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7.44 pm)—I rise this evening to pay tribute to each of the 2009 Penrith City Wall of Achievement Award recipients. The Wall of Achievement Awards honour those people who have made a significant contribution to the Penrith community. In recognising their achievements, their photographs are hung on the wall of the Penrith City Library for 12 months.
Valerie Anderson has volunteered five days a week for the past 14 years at the St Mary’s Anglicare shop as well as with Meals on Wheels and Our Lady of the Rosary at St Mary’s. Merle Blatch has been working with volunteer groups in Penrith for the last 50 years, including Inner Wheel, local schools and the St Stephens Anglican Church. John Boccanfuso has been selling pens to raise money for the House With No Steps since 1971. John can be found in his wheelchair at Westfield Penrith most days selling pens—with his wonderful smile.

Cathy Craig has been helping to coordinate the Penrith Community Kitchen since 1993, where they serve tens of thousands of meals every year to those in need. Patricia Curry, who is a member of the Nepean District Historical Society, has been a keen local historian for 40 years and volunteers at the Penrith library, indexing old editions of the Nepean Times. Margaret Dwyer, an icon of St Mary’s, has been a resident of the Penrith city for over 70 years and has made a life-long commitment to the growth and development of our community. Margaret Gibbs has been involved in the Girl Guides movement for almost 20 years, volunteering to lead groups and help teach young women to be responsible members of the community.

Joyce Leavett-Brown is a member of the Penrith Creative Embroiderers and has been a community advocate for almost 40 years. Christine McKinnon is a member of the Management Committee for the Werrington Community Project, and has volunteered at the Deaf and Blind Society and at Lifeline as a telephone counsellor. Joan McKinnon is a regular volunteer at the St Mary’s Anglicare shop, and has been for the past seven years. Reginald Menz, an active member of the Nepean District Historical Society, has raised thousands of dollars for the society since becoming treasurer in 2000, and has helped make the William Cox Day a major local event.

Bill Reeves is the Chairman of Bridge the Gap, after having served as president from 1993 to 2005. Bill is also President of the Australian Family Association and a recipient of the Paul Harris Fellow Award. Barry Roots is the Headmaster of Penrith Anglican College. He has overseen the construction and establishment of two new schools in the area and has been a highly respected educator for more than 40 years.

Audrey (Sue) Sewter is a local historian who has worked for more than 20 years to document the history of those buried in St Stephens Anglican Church cemetery and has written six books on the subject with the Nepean District Historical Society. John Smith volunteers with Sailability, at the International Regatta Centre, and teaches young people and people with a disability how to sail. As a member of the Penrith Disabilities Resource Centre, Sherille Stephens has overcome serious disability to become an advocate for women’s health and for disability access in Penrith. Sister Joyce Vella works at the Mamre Project at the historic Mamre homestead, delivering support services to members of the community. She has fought through two major illnesses and is currently the coordinator of Mamre’s Disability Program. Craig Werner is a former president of the Nepean District Historical Society. Craig helped to digitise the society’s collections, so they are now preserved for generations to come.

While he lives outside of Penrith, Bob Thatcher has given 23 years of his life to working at the Mamre Project and making a difference to our community, earning a special Penrith Appreciation category of the award. Joy Gillett has spent the last decade as an executive member of the Penrith Netball Association, lending her talents to the
management and governance of the association. She was made a life member in 2008.
Karl Preuss played table tennis for 25 years and has represented New South Wales and
Australia. He was a volunteer umpire for table tennis during the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.
Michael Soper was heavily involved in local junior cricket through Penrith RSL,
as well as being a competition motorcyclist, rower and snooker player during his 73 years
in Penrith. Gina Field was one of the first female security guards in New South Wales
and went on to establish her own successful business, Nepean Regional Security.
Finally, Linda Coates is a dedicated carer who has cared for her husband and daughter
throughout serious illness and injury, while still working to support her family. Congratulations
to all the recipients of the 2009 Wall of Achievement Awards. You are
deserving of this honour and you are among Penrith’s finest citizens—heroes of our
community.

Australians Travelling Overseas
Mr MORRISON (Cook) (7.49 pm)—
Each year thousands of young Australians travel overseas, especially in their gap year,
to the UK and Europe. It has become an Australian right of passage. Last month, 22-year-
old Caringbah resident Natasha Wheeler got on a plane to the UK, having worked to save
$2,500 over the past year for a dream holiday of a lifetime travelling around Europe and
Ireland with her best friend.

The dream for Natasha quickly turned into a nightmare, when she was refused entry into
the UK after arriving at Heathrow Airport. She arrived in London with money in her bank account, a return flight back to Australia and a pre-booked sightseeing tour. She was detained for more than 16 hours in a holding-cell at the airport terminal along with six men in the same room, one of whom was ill. There were chairs in the room and
she was given one blanket and one pillow. She was denied access to her personal items. She was interviewed regarding her travel plans. There was no witness and no recording device for the interview. After three hours she was allowed to call home, at her own expense. You can imagine the concern of her parents, Glenn and Michelle, who had asked her to call immediately on her arrival, to let them know she was safe.

Natasha was afraid, on her own and half a world away. She was hysterical on the phone, crying uncontrollably, telling her father, ‘I don’t want to stay here dad. Please get me out of here. There are two really bad looking men who are really angry in here with me and I don’t feel safe.’ After 16 hours she was escorted by security guards onto her flight back to Australia. Natasha described it as the most humiliating experience of her young life.

On her return, the British High Commission advised that a full explanation of the UK Immigration Office’s decision to refuse Natasha entry was written in a letter, specifically detailing Natasha’s case, and was given to Natasha at the time. Natasha did not receive this letter, nor has she seen it. When the British High Commission was asked for a copy of the letter this was refused, stating it was unavailable. Upon arrival back in Sydney she noticed she had a black cross put through the Heathrow stamp in her passport, which may now also impede any future travel plans.

Just two weeks later it happened again—to another young person from my electorate. Justin Ali, an 18-year-old from Cronulla, was sent back to Australia from the UK on 9 November. Justin was detained for 54 hours—more than two days—in a holding cell with two other men. It was his intention to stay in London for only 19 days and he had booked a return flight to Australia. He even had a
flight to Hamilton Island booked for the next month and had a job back in Australia. Like Natasha, he was not planning to look for work in the UK. Justin’s mother contacted my office for help. We made contact with both Australian and UK officials and sought to facilitate contact between Justin and his mother. It was extremely frustrating for me, as a local MP, to be told that neither your own government nor the British High Commission was able, or prepared, to intervene.

I believe both of these cases warrant further investigation by the Australian government through our high commission regarding the actions of the UK government. We must also review our own processes of how we seek to inform and support Australians and their families in this situation. While the travel advisory on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website notes that people suspected of intending to work could be refused entry, reasonable steps should be taken to avoid the risk of innocent Australians being incorrectly detained or refused entry—or being treated in this matter.

People need to know what their rights are if detained and questioned by immigration officials. They should clearly state that the purpose of the trip is a journey. They should have and be able to demonstrate adequate funds to support their stay. They should not take any resumes or similar information unless they have a prior approved working visa. They should seek to have pre-booked accommodation when they arrive. They should also be aware that a return air fare six months out will trigger alarm bells with immigration officials in the UK. We should also look at what support is available to these young Australians and their families from the Australian government in these situations.

Only a few days before he left Australia, Justin and his mother saw the story about Natasha in our local newspaper, the Leader. Justin did not pay too much attention to the article; he thought it was not going to happen to him—after all, he was registered on smartraveller.gov.au.

I hope by my raising these issues here this evening that young Australians planning to travel to the UK for a holiday, particularly from our shire, and their parents will take the necessary precautions, discuss the issue at home and have a plan to deal with this situation should it arise. They should also discuss the very real risks of travelling abroad and be aware of the dangers that are present. Make sure you also register your journey at www.smartraveller.gov.au, and under no circumstances should you go there seeking to gain work without a proper visa—not that Justin or Natasha were doing that.

While I respect the sovereignty of every nation on immigration matters, I believe that in the cases I have talked about tonight the UK government owes these young Australians an apology. Surely the strength of our relationship should have yielded a better outcome than what has occurred here. It is not right that young Australians be mistreated because of the economic crisis in the UK. We can and should do better for innocent young Australians who have made their sacrifices, saved their money and gone through all the hoops to have one of the best experiences of their lives.

Ms Phyllis Johnson

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (7.54 pm)—I rise to pay tribute to a remarkable woman, Phyllis Johnson, who died on 20 July this year aged 92. A wonderful obituary was written by Tony Stephens in the Sydney Morning Herald on Tuesday, 4 August 2009 and I propose to quote from it extensively. He says:

Phyllis Johnson was a campaigner of substance, and on many fronts. She campaigned for ‘Liberty Loans’ to raise funds to wage World War
II, against the prime minister, Robert Menzies, in his attempts to ban the Communist Party, for women’s refuges and equal pay and, most famously, against rising prices.

... ... ...

Johnson was jailed for speaking out against conscription for war and twice thrown out of the NSW Parliament ... At the age of 90 she set up a table and chair at her local shopping centre to get signatures on a petition for the Your Rights at Work Campaign.

... ... ...

She joined the Communist Party in 1937, attended her first International Women’s Day the same year, joined the campaign against fascism and the Spanish Civil War, became involved in the New Theatre and, in 1939, married John Johnson, a violin maker and communist.

... ... ...

Johnson came to public prominence in 1970 when she set up the Campaign Against Rising Prices with other women from around Bankstown. They blamed multinational groups for forcing up prices, often of food, and their campaign gained an international profile.

Protesting against the soap makers, Johnson made her own at home in kerosene tins, and requests for recipes came from Afghanistan and Mexico. She arranged ‘sit-ins’ outside supermarkets that sold what she regarded as rancid butter and fetid bacon to unsuspecting shoppers. When some supermarkets started checking shoppers’ bags, the campaign members filled their handbags with rat traps and fake spiders.

In 1973, having repeatedly failed to meet the premier, Sir Robert Askin, the Campaign Against Rising Prices members protested from the public gallery in the Legislative Assembly, calling for control of prices. Attendants had to forcibly remove her after the speaker, Sir Kevin Ellis, adjourned the House.

However, after the Wran Labor government came to power in 1976, Johnson worked more happily with Syd Einfeld, the minister for consumer affairs. They were sometimes called ‘Mr and Mrs Prices’.

In 1975 she opened the doors of Betsy Women’s Refuge in Bankstown, to which she and several other women had allocated funds from their housekeeping money.

She loved poetry, especially Australian bush poetry, and often recited it. She spoke of herself as ‘the last of the red Matildas’.

Her honours include a medal in the Order of Australia in 1989, the Queen’s Silver Jubilee Medal (1977), Bankstown Woman of the Year (1977), the Syd Einfeld Award (1993), the Centenary Medal (2001) and the Eureka Medal (2008).

One of her obituaries, in the Guardian—the Workers Weekly, quotes Phyllis as saying:

I have always striven to do my best on behalf of the working people. I believe we can have no higher goal in life and cannot in good conscience do less.

I first met Phyllis in 1974 when I joined the Labor Party and was campaigning in the local election. I ran into her on a number of occasions until her death. She was a remarkable woman. I visited her on a number of occasions at home when she was ill and she was aged, but she still kept articulating the message. It was a message of compassion; it was a message of tolerance and understanding of our fellow peoples.

There was a remarkable wake for Phyllis, where her son and daughter opened up her home for her friends, many of them from the Communist Party and many of them aged because they were of her era. Sadly, her son, Peter, has subsequently passed away, so she is now only survived by Alice, her daughter.

She was a great supporter of mine. She often rang me up and gave me advice—advice which I was happy to take from her. She was a giver, not a taker. She was someone who was respected across our community. She had radical views, yes, but she was someone who people liked because she was always friendly. She did not have a grizzling bone in her body and she always treated people with
warmth. Sure, she could talk, but she actually had some substance in what she was saying. She is sadly missed by her friends. She was a warm and wonderful human being who enriched our community. I pay tribute to her.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 7.59 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

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

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Criminal Code Act 1995 and the Death Penalty Abolition Act 1973, and for related purposes.

Dr Kelly to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to the management of water resources in the Australian Capital Territory, to amend the Water Act 2007, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to confidentiality of information acquired under the taxation laws, and for other purposes.

Ms Rishworth to move:

That the House:

(1) notes with concern the increasing sexualisation and objectification of girls in mainstream media;

(2) recognises that both media and peer influences contribute to the sexualisation of girls including:

(a) television, music videos, magazines, music lyrics, movies, cartoons, clothing, toys, computer games and the internet; and

(b) attitudes of peers and family;

(3) notes with concern the potential negative consequences of the sexualisation of girls on children and young adults, including negative body image, eating disorders, low self-esteem, mental illness, poor physical health and gender role stereotyping;

(4) believes further research is necessary to understand the full effects that early sexualisation and objectification of girls in the mainstream media has on children and young adults;

(5) urges governments, publishers, broadcasters, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to:

(a) work together to review and develop appropriate standards and industry guidelines to address the sexualisation of children and limit its negative impact; and

(b) assist parents and children to understand and manage the influence of sexualisation of girls in the mainstream media and associated negative consequences.
Petition: Youth Allowance

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (9.30 am)—It is a pleasure to be in the Main Committee this morning to present a petition in relation to the youth allowance changes by the federal government. As members would be well aware, in the May budget the government announced a flawed scheme for changes to youth allowance. These are shameful changes which have had a visceral impact on rural and regional Australians, particularly young people who had dreams of a university and higher education career but who have had those cut short by the government’s short-sightedness and lack of understanding of the issues that affect rural and regional Australians.

The primary alteration was to require young people in rural and regional Australia to fulfil a 30-hour work test to be able to qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance. Anybody who lives outside the cities knows that the idea that there are a plethora of casual or almost full-time jobs available in country towns across Australia for 30 hours a week is living in la-la land. The reality is that they do not have access to those kinds of jobs and therefore their dreams of higher education will be cut short.

The second change that the opposition has tremendous problems with is the issue of cutting off students who are currently in their gap year, who planned their lives around the rules as they were. The government has changed those rules halfway through the game, and those students are now facing an entirely different prospect for the future. The coalition will not support retrospective legislation. My colleague in the Senate, Senator Guy Barnett from Tasmania, has run a petition through the northern part of his electorate—he tends to take care of Launceston and that area around Northern Tasmania. He has organised this petition, which draws the attention of the members of the House of Representatives to the paucity of ideas in the Labor government to do with the youth allowance, the impact it will have on university students and future university students, the fact that it flies in the face of Labor promises to do with obtaining more access for young people to higher education and the embarrassment that is the education revolution in so many areas, but particularly in this area of youth allowance.

The petition has achieved 1,057 signatures and it has been approved by the Standing Committee on Petitions. Because of the importance of youth allowance, particularly to people in rural and regional Tasmania—and also across Australia—and as the shadow minister responsible for education, I felt it was appropriate to present the petition in person on behalf of Senator Barnett and the 1,057 good Tasmanian citizens who have signed this and who are genuinely concerned about the impact of youth allowance on the future of young Tasmanians. I present the petition.

The petition read as follows—

To the honourable The Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
This petition of Launceston citizens draws the attention of the House to the proposed amendments to the Youth Allowance and Independent status requirement as outlined in the Universities, Innovation and Education Revolution (UIER), May 2009.
1. 18 months is an unreasonable time frame for students, as universities do not allow deferment beyond 12 months.
2. In this economic climate 30 hours a week is an unreasonable expectation.
3. Rural and regional students are heavily disadvantaged, as many if not all need to relocate to attend university.
4. Education should be about merit, not financial situation.
5. The Rudd Government was elected on promises about support for “working families” and an “education revolution”; these amendments undermine both promises.
6. As 18 year olds are adults in every legal sense (tried as adults, able to vote, pay tax etc…), to tie one adult to another adult’s income is unjust.
7. We believe that in these times, our best hope for the future is in the education of our youth.
8. These amendments reflect short term thinking.
9. These laws undermine the “equality of opportunity,” referred to in the Rudd Governments UIER document.
10. Present and future year 12 students will be equally disadvantaged and excluded from accessing tertiary education, the pathway to enhanced life chances.

We therefore ask the House to withdraw this proposal as we feel it disadvantages and disenfranchises Australia’s youth, especially those from rural and regional areas, as well as those in working families who are classed as “middle income earners” (above $42,559 p.a.).

Petition received.

Deakin Electorate: Digital Television

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (9.33 am)—I rise to speak about the provision of digital spectrum for community television. The announcement by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, on 4 November was very welcome indeed. With the current changeover from analog to digital transmission well underway, the number of people who have digital TVs in their household is increasing every day. The current June 2009 figure for households which have converted to digital TV now stands at 53 per cent.

This has presented a problem to community TV broadcasters, as until now they have been shut out of the digital market and left with only analog transmission. This has led to a decline in viewing audiences in recent times, as not everyone is able to, or aware of how to, watch analog transmissions on digital TV receivers.

Channel 31, the Melbourne based community TV broadcaster, along with TVS in Sydney, QCTV in Brisbane and Channel 31 in Adelaide, has been temporarily allocated vacant spectrum, which will enable simulcast until the analog switch-off in 2013. The Australian community television sector has also been allocated $2.6 million in funding support to help cover the cost of upgrading systems to enable that digital broadcasting.

I am on the record as being a supporter of community broadcasting. I have spoken in this place previously on the restoration of student services in the tertiary sector where that tied into broadcasting, and it is great news that community TV is now being accommodated on digital. But we do have to look at why this has happened. It was the Howard government that neglected to allocate digital spectrum to community TV in 2001. At the time, all commercial
and national TV stations were given digital spectrum space. The current announcement means that community TV can now be watched by a much larger audience both now and in the future.

I visited the studios in Swanston Street and discussed the operation of Channel 31 with the management, workers and volunteers and was really impressed with both their professionalism and their enthusiasm. Channel 31 commenced broadcasting in 1994 and has a permanent licence that was granted in 2004. It now has 1.4 million viewers per month. Some 27 people are directly employed by the station, 80 people are directly employed producing shows for Channel 31 and over 1,300 volunteers work on its programs. Channel 31 and the other, inter-state community TV stations undertake important training roles for students who are entering or considering entering into the workplace in TV, radio or other related areas both in front of the camera and behind the scenes.

Channel 31, its staff and volunteers are to be commended for their innovation and resourcefulness. They manage to produce on a shoestring shows that otherwise would not go to air. On receiving advice that the Rudd government was supporting the station, the news release from the station was moved to say, ‘Thanks, Kev.’ On behalf of a large and diverse audience and the many, many constituents who wrote to me on this matter I would like to say, ‘Thanks, Channel 31.’

**Lung Health Awareness Month**

*Mrs MAY* (McPherson) (9.37 am)—I rise today to talk about the important issue of lung disease in Australia. Lung disease is a significant and growing health issue in Australia and this month is Lung Health Awareness Month. Each year lung disease places a considerable burden on Australia’s hospital system, resulting in nearly 350,000 hospitalisations and, sadly, causing 19,000 deaths. According to the Australian Lung Foundation, during 2007-08 there were 617,000 cases of lung disease reported in Queensland, but many more remain undiagnosed. Only about 25 per cent of Australians with lung cancer are diagnosed early enough for curative surgery to be attempted. In addition, Australian research indicates that half of all those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which includes emphysema or chronic bronchitis, are unaware that they have the disease, even though it is advanced enough to already be affecting their quality of life.

More than a third of Australians, 36 per cent, who have experienced one or more of these symptoms have never spoken to their doctor about their symptoms, which could be putting them at risk of serious illness or even death. Associate Professor Kwun Fong, physician at the Prince Charles Hospital, Brisbane, explained that lung disease is a serious condition which many Australians may be at risk of developing, according to new research. He says: Lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and many other lesser known conditions such as pulmonary arterial hypertension are all serious lung conditions. Many lung diseases are caused by a history of smoking or exposure to dust, gas or fumes and in some instances genetics may also be a factor.

To improve early diagnosis and encourage consumer awareness of lung disease symptoms, the Australian Lung Foundation recently launched a new lung health checklist, which is available online and was developed in consultation with leading respiratory clinicians. This educational tool encourages early diagnosis and allows people with respiratory symptoms to understand
their lung health and effectively communicate with their doctor. It is imperative that, through such campaigns, the community is educated on the risks of inaction.

The Australian Lung Foundation is to be commended on its work in increasing awareness and highlighting the importance of education in relation to respiratory conditions. The flow-on effect across the health system would be considerable if Australians began to take the issue seriously. Dr Ian Yang from the Prince Charles Hospital, Brisbane sums the situation up with great clarity. He says:

It is critical that Australians know what the symptoms of lung disease can be and act on their lung health, as this can make a real difference to quality of life.

I could not agree more with him and I congratulate the Australian Lung Foundation on its work.

**National School Chaplaincy Program**

*Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (9.39 am)—I rise to acknowledge all of the people in my community who have written to, emailed or met with me personally to talk about the National School Chaplaincy Program. I know that this program has flourished in Queensland because of the original structure which came from the Scripture Union. Many schools in my electorate do not have federal funding but have a chaplain in their schools as a consequence of the Scripture Union. Since the federal funding was introduced, many of my schools have taken up this initiative. Four out of my five secondary state schools have chaplains in their schools. Seven out of my 15 state primary schools have school chaplains. Many of my private schools, in fact 17 of my 33 schools, actually have chaplains. Those that do not have chaplains as a consequence of the National School Chaplaincy Program have chaplains as a consequence of the Scripture Union. Obviously, from what I am saying, I support chaplains in the schools.

In addition to all of the comments that have been forwarded to me and the comments that have been made to me personally, I have seen the difference that the chaplains make at these schools. I have seen schools such as Clontarf Beach State High School take the initiative of having two chaplains. Their original chaplain was employed through the Scripture Union, but they then sought funding to put on an additional chaplain because they saw a particular need to have a male role model for their male students at the high school. They were successful in having an additional chaplain put on and that male chaplain has been doing amazing work with the young male students. It is important that we support our young people in these schools.

I accept that this program has not always been successful. To a large degree it has not always been taken up in some other states and areas. I also accept that there is always room for improvement and that parents and schools are looking for flexibility in relation to a program like this. It is important that the federal government look at the program and look at what is best for our students, as well as support parents and staff and the schools overall. I stand with my parents, my principals and my students in saying that I support the National School Chaplaincy Program, and I support seeing this program continue beyond 2010.

**Dalwood Assessment Centre and Palm Avenue School Residential Program**

*Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (9.42 am)—I would like to draw the House’s attention to the situation regarding rural and regional students with learning disabilities, literacy in particular, who are currently able to go to Dalwood Assessment Centre and Palm Avenue School Resi-
dential Program in Sydney, which are designed to help children from rural and regional areas with literacy and behavioural issues. These two facilities currently work together. The assessment centre is to assess the needs of the child and the residential school is to provide long-term on-campus support. This site is located at Seaforth, on the northern beaches of Sydney. The centre opened in 1972 and has been providing services to primary aged children in remote and rural areas since then. It is the only facility to cater for rural and remote children with a literacy problem, which is obviously impacting upon their learning and behavioural situations. It is a two-part program and provides assessment and residential support; one being Dalwood the other being Palm Avenue.

Dalwood is to be closed down and Palm Avenue is to be moved to Westmead Hospital. There has been no indication of what assessment services are going to be made available prior to children going into the residential program. The residential program is currently an eight-week intensive course where students are provided with direct and comprehensive support to assist with their literacy and, as a result of course, their behavioural issues. There is also an outreach program which currently caters for over 100 children around the state. It works in conjunction with the child’s school and, where necessary, with the Royal Flying Doctor Service for those students who are very remote.

While Dalwood and the Palm Avenue School are regarded as the last options, they take children who are referred from schools, health professionals and, in some cases, the parents themselves. Reportedly, the New South Wales Premier said the site was underutilised, which is why the school has to be moved. It being on prime real estate in Sydney, I do not think we have to wonder why the Premier is looking to sell it. There has been no consultation, nor has there been any real information on the downgrading, the axing or the relocation.

I would like this government, the Minister for Education, Ms Gillard, and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, to look into this on our behalf. I am making that information available to them.

Wakefield Electorate: Events

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (9.45 am)—On 31 October I opened the Kapunda Show. It was a great honour to open the Kapunda Show for 2009. Kapunda, of course, is the town I grew up in. It was a very special day for me. I saw many of my old schoolmates and friends from Kapunda. I would particularly like to thank the show committee for the great honour, including the President, Mrs Roxanne Rosenzweig, who I went to school with; the Vice-President, Ms Lorin Fiebig; the Treasurer, Mr Ron Lee; and the Secretary, who I know always has a busy show day, Mrs Jacqui Bridge. They run a wonderful show every year.

The show is a great focus for community involvement and participation. It is a great place for people to see one another. I did bump into a few old charges too—Ross Vogt, who is 86 years old and still riding motorbikes, which I think is pretty incredible, and Reg Rawadi, who ran a deli in Kapunda for many years and was involved in the musical society in the town. He is an absolute institution in the town. He is a great fellow.

On 7 November we had a charity dinner in my electorate called Championing the Cause. They used me to advertise it, but of course there were a great many people who were really involved in the organisation. I want to honour them. The charity dinner was for the Elizabeth Special School, the Elizabeth Vale School, Northern Carers and the Northern Domestic Vio-
lence Service. They are all very good causes. I want to thank Ian May; Jodie Habermehl; Kathy Tripodi; Marge Roger; Ian Hartley-Brammer; Carmela Zappia; Chris Miller; Sharon van Pamelen; David Chehade; Angela MacFarlane; Leona Cox; Shirley Young; Lee Odenwalder, who works in my office; and Leesa Vlahos, who is the state candidate for Taylor. All of those people did a great job in organising a very good dinner. It raised a great deal of money for local causes.

On 15 November I also attended the Balaklava Community Children’s Centre for their 50th anniversary. I want to thank Chris Fisher, the director, for that honour. We opened a new veranda. The chairperson there is Jo Michalanny. They both work extremely hard at providing a very good kindergarten for Balaklava. To survive 50 years, to prosper and to be able to construct a new veranda is a terrific achievement. I want to congratulate them as well.

**Water**

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (9.49 am)—I rise this morning to speak on the No. 1 issue in many parts of Australia and certainly the No. 1 issue in my electorate of Indi in north-east Victoria, and that is water. We are suffering the effects of drought and diminishing water supply. Many irrigators in the local area have not received their full water entitlement for some years now. Many local communities have had water trucked in to fill their tanks so they can have water for household use, and towns with larger water supplies are on water restrictions for much of the year.

We have had a disastrous decision by the Victorian government to build a pipeline, commonly called the north-south pipeline, the construction of which has almost been completed. It is to take water from the already strained Murray-Darling Basin in the north and send it south to Melbourne for human consumption. We have seen the federal government complicit in the irresponsible reallocation of water from this stressed part of Victoria to Melbourne. The Rudd government has been careful to pretend to distance itself from stage 1 of the proposal, which was the north-south pipeline, although the environment minister approved stage 1 of the project under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. The water minister recently issued an ultimatum to the Victorian government threatening to withhold a promised $1 billion of funding if the Victorian parliament does not pass a bill relating to the north-south pipeline, which is blatant blackmail of state MPs in Victoria who are representing the concerns of country Victorians.

The savings generated from this upgrade of irrigation channels in stage 2 are supposed to be shared between environmental flows and local irrigators. Stage 1 works were to generate water savings to service the pipeline to Melbourne. It is inexplicable for the water minister to now be making stage 2 funding conditional on the actions of non-Labor MPs who happen to be opposed to water being piped to Melbourne. There is local concern about this, and obviously both state and federal governments do not really care because it does not seem to affect them electorally, irrespective of their responsibility to govern for all Victorians and all Australians.

We have the disastrous policy by the Victorian state government to have no more dams. They want to increase Australia’s population but they have absolutely no idea and no plan for one of the basic, vital needs of a growing population—that is, water. So they come up with all this rhetoric but have no plans. We have seen the desalination plant—another disastrous proposal for the environment and for future taxpayers. We have seen the financing arrangements
through the PPP, which will be poor value for taxpayers. And the list goes on. Unfortunately, Labor is a disaster for water and for country communities. (Time expired)

Adelaide Airport

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.52 am)—Over the last week we have seen the Liberal Party in South Australia declare war on the Adelaide Airport curfew. A passenger flight, after taking off late from Sydney last Thursday night, asked the department that administers the Adelaide Airport curfew for a dispensation from the curfew. Its delay was entirely predictable; when that plane took off they knew they were running extremely late. Consequently, the dispensation was not given—and rightly so. Talkback radio formed the view that the plane was about to land at one minute past 11. This was not the case. The plane asked for dispensation whilst it was approaching Adelaide, 200 to 300 kilometres out of Adelaide. At that point it was one minute past 11. Therefore, the plane would have landed well after 10 past 11, clearly in breach of the curfew.

The Liberal Party in South Australia came out the next day and declared war on the curfew. Shadow ministers, including the Leader of the Opposition, came out and spoke one after the other, saying that this was bureaucracy gone mad, that we should water it down and that we should allow planes to come in during curfew hours. The curfew was put in place for a specific reason. The Adelaide Airport is six kilometres from the CBD, in the middle of a metropolitan area. It is not unusual, around the world, to have curfews where they are in a residential zone. LaGuardia Airport in New York, Amsterdam international and Sydney Airport—all have curfews. The reason for that is that we need to have a good balance between the residents and business, and we have that good balance in Adelaide. So for the Liberal Party to come out and say that the curfew should be watered down was absurd. It was disrespectful to those residents in the western suburbs. The curfew has always existed. When the new owners of Adelaide Airport purchased that airport 10 years ago they knew that there was a curfew in place. The Liberals must come clean with the western suburbs residents in Adelaide and let them know what their intentions are with the curfew. After what we saw last week, with all the Liberal opposition spokespeople coming out and speaking against it, I am sure that they are looking at changes, and that would be a terrible disaster for those residents that live in the western suburbs.

There are dispensations available for airlines. A dispensation is given in an emergency. It is given under exceptional circumstances. The reason for requiring a dispensation must be immediate in nature. Last week it was not immediate and it was not unforeseen in nature. They were aware of it when they took off. They were also aware that they would be arriving late. The need must be unable to be met by alternative arrangements. This also was not the case.

This is the current arrangement, which the Leader of the Opposition in South Australia did not know about. This is a system that has served the people of the western suburbs very well over the years and, as I said, the Liberals must come clean, both in this place and in South Australia, and let the people of the western suburbs know whether they are going to honour a curfew if they ever form government. (Time expired)

MAIN COMMITTEE
Lavarack Barracks

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (9.55 am)—Lavarack Barracks in Townsville is Australia’s largest military base by far. More than 50,000 soldiers have served there during its forty-year history. Right now, the senior leadership of the army—all of them—have been through the 3rd Brigade in Townsville. The Australian Defence Force clearly understands that, if you do not have a posting through the 3rd Brigade, your career does not go terribly far. I pay tribute to those officers who are in the current senior leadership and who have served in Townsville.

To my very great surprise, during the week a forum, held in Cairns to look at the very poor economic conditions of that city, came up with the idea of transferring some of Lavarack Barracks up there. I have to say to you, ‘Over my dead body, Cairns! This is not going to be allowed. I will fight tooth and nail against any plan you might have to try to move parts of Lavarack to Cairns. It is a ridiculous suggestion.’ The 3rd Brigade, as Australia’s premier brigade, needs all of its units together in the one barracks so that it can work operationally most effectively. It will not do that if units are in other parts of Australia; it is the reason why we are bringing the 3rd Battalion from Holsworthy up to Townsville—the 3rd Battalion is commanded by the 3rd Brigade and we are having all the units at Lavarack, Australia’s premier military base. We spent a lot of money, and we are currently spending something like $500 million on Lavarack, making it such a magnificent base.

If Cairns continues to talk about this, I warn them that I will be looking at bringing parts of HMAS Cairns down to Townsville that would make sense. The client for the new landing helicopter dock—LHD—ships that Defence is buying is the 3rd Brigade, and it would be absolutely sensible to have those ships based in Townsville, not in Cairns, nor in Sydney. If that needs support, then we will take the support out of HMAS Cairns and bring it down to a Navy base in Townsville. So, Cairns, my warning to you is that you have a battle on your hands if you pursue this. I will certainly stand up with all the effort that I can.

The reason that Cairns is doing this and the reason they have such a poor economy is that it is based only on tourism; it is not a broad based economy. By doing that, Cairns has got itself into its own pickle; it is in a terrible situation. But they are not going to get themselves out of that situation by affecting the economy of my city. I am a fierce defender of the men and women of the Australian Defence Force at Lavarack Barracks and will continue to be so.

Liverpool Jobs Expo

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.58 am)—A month ago I had the great honour of attending the first of the government’s planned job expos. It was conducted in my electorate of Werriwa—in Liverpool, to be precise. It was a fantastic event. I turned up, as we around this place turn up to many events, not quite knowing what to expect. To put it in context, Liverpool currently has an unemployment rate of 8.6 per cent. The south-west of Sydney is one of those areas where unemployment is a crucial thing, but more disturbing is the youth unemployment rate, which borders around 25 per cent.

Over 9,000 people turned up for this job expo, which was put on by the department and chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment, Jason Clare. Many employers not only participated by posting jobs earlier during the week but posted jobs that day. While I was there, 575 real jobs were put on boards to attract young people and people who are unemployed, which showed the employers’ desire to participate. TAFE colleges, various govern-
ment based employers and youth facilities were represented. This was all about coordinating the activities of the south-west of Sydney with a view to targeting employment.

It was also very good to have Scott Cam from *Backyard Blitz* as the guest speaker on that occasion. I thought that since he was there he obviously was not doing my backyard, so I was safe about that. There was a lot of lawnmowing to be done when I got home after not having been there for a month or so. Bear in mind that, for the younger people there, this fellow epitomises a builder who goes out there and can turn his hand to various things. His message to the young people of south-western Sydney was, ‘Have a can-do attitude.’ He encouraged young people who participated in this expo to go out and back themselves, be confident and have a go. I thought that was a pretty inspirational position to take. As I said, 9,000 people went through the turnstiles, so we know precisely how many people are showing an interest in this. More importantly, having 575 real jobs on display for people was a marvellous tribute to Jason Clare and his team within the department.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)** — In accordance with standing order 193, sadly for the member for Oxley, the time for members’ constituency statements has concluded.

**CRIMES AMENDMENT (WORKING WITH CHILDREN—CRIMINAL HISTORY) BILL 2009**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 October, on motion by Mr Brendan O’Connor:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (10.01 am)—I rise today to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009. The proposed amendments in this bill will create an exception for convictions of persons who work, or seek to work, with children so that those convictions are disclosed and can be taken into account by Commonwealth, state and territory screening agencies in determining whether the person is suitable to work with children. Working to protect and ensure our children are safe is, and should be, a priority for all Australians, as I am sure it is; therefore, the coalition is supportive of this bill. Every day we see children in our communities and parents have a lot of confidence in those to whom they entrust the care of their children, and they need to be able to do so.

This bill implements the agreement of the Council of Australian Governments on 29 November 2008 to facilitate the interjurisdictional exchange of criminal history information regarding people working, or seeking to work, with children, including information about spent, pardoned or quashed convictions. As part of the agreement, each jurisdiction is required to remove any legislative impediments to the exchange of the criminal history information for people seeking to work with children. This legislation has a number of safeguards for protecting both the children and those who are currently working with children or seeking or applying to work with children.

Such safeguards include a comprehensive regime for assessing people who work, or seek to work, with children. They must be balanced with a person’s right to rehabilitation, privacy and employment. Criminal history information received will only be used for the limited purpose of assessing the risk that a person may pose in working with children and not for another purpose. A potential employee’s criminal history information will not be given to their employer. The employer will simply receive a yes or no from the screening unit. The information
may not be used for the purpose of a general integrity or employment suitability check, and a person has the right of appeal. A person with a no can appeal the decision of a screening unit and is able to view the reason for the no decision and why it was made. It is important that we are having a 12-month trial of the new sharing arrangement system—which will start in November 2009—between the agencies that already have screening units. This is another important check and balance.

Such safeguards are essential in protecting Australian children against predators and to ensure the privacy of those seeking to work with children. It is, as we are aware, a very unfortunate fact that child abuse occurs regularly in Australia. Furthermore, I was very disturbed to read in the Daily Telegraph on 19 October that there were five times more sex crimes committed on children by children than five years ago. I think that would be a statistic which is disturbing to many in this place. Also, the number of cases in which children have indecently assaulted a child under the age of 10 has doubled since 2004. The same article quoted Professor Freda Briggs, from the University of South Australia, who stated that schools often write off assaults by children on other students as typical childhood bad behaviours, without the victim being recognised or removed from a dangerous situation. Unfortunately, this is in line with an article from 12 November in a local newspaper in my electorate which stated that, according to a 2005 national report, it is estimated that only 36 per cent of domestic violence cases are reported to police. These articles are proof and a reminder of the need to reinforce the message that it is not acceptable for an adult or a fellow child to commit a crime against a child, and this needs to be seriously reinforced.

The Western Australian Attorney-General and Minister for Corrective Services, Christian Porter, summarised Western Australia’s current position on working with children criminal history checks in his submission to the Senate inquiry, and I quote:

The Western Australian government takes child protection very seriously—as do members in this House—with the WA Minister for Child Protection, the Hon. Robyn McSweeney, announcing amendments on 3 November to the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WA), which provides for procedures for checking the criminal record of people who carry out, or propose to carry out, child-related work and to prohibit people who have been charged with or convicted of certain offences from carrying out child-related work.

The Western Australian government takes child protection very seriously—as do members in this House—with the WA Minister for Child Protection, the Hon. Robyn McSweeney, announcing amendments on 3 November to the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WA) which aim to close the current loopholes relating to working with children cards. These amendments will strengthen the current act and exclude people with criminal histories that indicate they may harm a child from starting or continuing child related work, regardless of whether that is paid or voluntary work. These amendments will see additional sexual offences added to the current class 1 schedule offences. Additional improvements will also see the capacity to receive an act on notification by the police commissioner of non-scheduled offences where persons have a change in criminal record and can no longer undertake child related work. These amendments in WA will strengthen the act and bring the child further into direct focus. In WA the working with children act is administered, as I said, by Robyn McSweeney, the Minister for Child Protection. I have great faith in her commitment to improving the safety of children in our communities by helping to prevent people who have such a criminal history from working with children, as this bill before us seeks to do.
I have been informed by the Western Australian Department for Child Protection that since the working with children check was introduced in Western Australia over 240,000 clearance cards have been issued. This equates to approximately one in every 10 Western Australians having a working with children clearance card. What is probably important for this House to note is that, of that number, approximately 150 negative checks have been recorded, meaning that children in Western Australia have been protected from approximately 150 potential predators. This demonstrates the value of this process.

The Western Australian criminal check system is live, meaning that information for registered cardholders is continually updated and is not simply based on the criminal record at the time of the application. As you can imagine, the advantage of this procedure is that any person who has applied for and received a working with children card and has since been convicted of an offence is made known to the administrative authority and action can be taken quickly to protect the children.

My electorate of Forrest, like most regional and rural electorates, often has a very relaxed social atmosphere and parents can sometimes be more trusting of members of the community with their children. While I know this lifestyle is so cherished by most of us and all of us who care about our children and our community it may increase the potential for a child predator to be exposed to children perhaps than is the case in other circumstances. I personally had experience with a trusted adult working with children in my own town who after investigation was revealed to be abusing a number of local children. It may be argued that this situation may have been avoided if the working with children criminal history check legislation had been in force at the time. However, if the person did not have a prior record this would not have altered the outcome.

We all know that nothing at all can beat parental supervision and awareness. I encourage all parents to take a very direct interest in those who are engaged with their children at all levels. The impact of this particular situation was not only on these trusting children and their parents and families but also on other children and our whole community. The whole community was damaged by this case and still is. In some instances the sustained and severe impacts on the individual children who are now adults will never, ever be mitigated. Some will never recover and some will never be able to live a balanced and happy life. The importance of this legislation and the potential impact it could have on children’s lives is significant.

As the Bills Digest states, ‘ensuring the protection and safety of children is always a desirable outcome.’ I know from speaking with members on all sides of the political debate that that is clearly a focus for everybody in this house. Toni, a small-business owner from my electorate, had the following to say about WA’s working with children criminal check system:

I have the working with children card and think that it is a must. It was one of the first things I got when starting my new business which is taking ponies to children’s parties. I advertise the fact that I have one,—

and I have been told that this is why people ring to hire me.

Christina, who is a teacher in the town of Donnybrook in my electorate, has said:

As a teacher working with kindergarten children for the past 17 years, I applaud and support any check that screens people in this profession. I am of the belief that if you have nothing to hide you have noth-
ing to fear. I see it being pointless to limit information regarding these checks to within each state, when many teachers and support staff move interstate.

I, like my coalition colleagues, see benefits in enhancing child protection in Australia by facilitating the interjurisdictional exchange of criminal history information regarding people working with or seeking to work with children. Authorities and potential employees must be made aware of the fact that some people are just not suited to be with or around children. I support this legislation.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (10.14 am)—I rise to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009. Children, as we all know, depend on adults. Clearly many of us here are parents, and I can say proudly in addition to that I am a grandparent and it is a very special time of life.

Kids actually do require adult supervision, whether it is from family members, family friends, teachers, football coaches, netball coaches, Scout troop and Girl Guide group leaders et cetera. The development in kids of new horizons is going to depend on the quality of adult supervision and interaction. Most of us who are parents, or in my case now as a grandparent, want nothing less for our kids than for them to experience the full range of activities that will enable them to fully develop their adult potential. So we certainly have a vital obligation to look at the issue of protecting our kids. We can no longer simply take for granted that we hold these views and that therefore everyone else holds the same view. I am pleased that this piece of legislation meets with bipartisan support. Why would it not.

There is no question that it involves an intrusion on liberties. Information will be distributed and, as I will go into a little later, will be used for the right purposes. But there is an overall good to be achieved, which is the development of potential in our kids. It will help to protect our kids from things that, when I was growing up, I have to say I certainly did not know all that much about. I suppose the reason for this was that I was heavily protected by my family. Many years back, I discovered that my father, who is now 86, was assaulted when he was young. He was badly beaten by a teacher at a religious school. He was in a coma. He was sent into the far west of Sydney—to a children’s home run, I think, by Barnardos. It was three months, so it was quite a serious assault. So there was probably a very clear reason why I and my brother and sister were protected when we grew up. If that could occur in a religious environment—an environment where people probably did not speak about those things—then no wonder we are seeing now what occurred to so many young people over a long period of time. People like me can say they did not see it when they grew up, but clearly it was there.

This piece of legislation is timely. It comes down in the very week of the apology being made to the forgotten Australians. I will be talking about them a little later on. As a matter of fact, a fellow in my electorate, John Hennessy, recounted to me what was meted out to him physically, emotionally and sexually when he was young. He is no longer young but it is something that has stayed with him all his life. It falls to us in our generation to say that these things simply should not occur and that we will take every step available to us to ensure that we protect the young in our community.

Screening is a vital tool if we are to take this promise seriously. Screening will help prevent people with a known history in violent and abusive behaviour towards children gaining access to them in various organisations. To this end, the development and implementation of a policy of legislation that provides full pre-employment screening of adults or people working as vol-

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unteers in child related organisations is an important strategy for creating and maintaining a child safe environment. Currently there is no single national framework setting out the requirements for obtaining checks for people working with children. Whilst I am on that issue, I would like to congratulate the Police Federation of Australia. They have campaigned on a range of different things, but in particular they have very strongly campaigned to have some degree of uniformity in relation to child protection matters.

Each state and territory has worked quite diligently and, no doubt, expertly within their own jurisdiction to protect children. They have procedures which require people who work in various industries that engage with children to go through these checks, but there are differences. It should be known that most states and territories have already introduced, or are in the advanced stages of developing, prescreening checks for people working with children. This legislation identifies broad categories of child related work where employers, employees and volunteers must undergo screening requirements.

There are differences across the jurisdictions regarding the types of screening programs that are in place, what records are checked and what can be transmitted. There are two types of screening programs in the country. Some states have an employee driven system, like New South Wales and South Australia, which makes it mandatory for employers in relevant fields to carry out background checks on prospective employees or volunteers coming within their purview. This system is a point-in-time background check and individuals must undertake screening each time they enter into a child related employment position, a child related position with a voluntary organisation et cetera.

The other type of check—and I congratulate the member for Forrest, who adequately described the position in Western Australia—which actually applies in Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, offers certification of individuals to engage in child related work. These certificates are valid for a period of, I think, three years in Western Australia and provide ongoing monitoring of an individual’s suitability for child related work. That means that, if a relevant criminal offence is committed during the validity of the certificate or if an individual is subject to a relevant work related disciplinary procedure, the administering authority may inform employers of the offence and alter or withdraw the individual’s entitlement to work with children. Individuals can also carry the certification between positions. Again, this was indicated by the member for Forrest. This way they do not have to undergo a repeated check each time they take on a position to work with children.

The Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009 aims to enhance the safety of children in our community by helping prevent people with a criminal history that indicates that they may harm children from working with children. It implements what was agreed at COAG on 29 November last year to facilitate an interjurisdictional exchange of criminal history information for people working with, or seeking to work with, children. Currently the provisions of the Crimes Act prevent disclosure of a person’s full criminal history. This bill will amend the Crimes Act 1914 to enable the disclosure and use of criminal history information about a person’s pardoned, quashed or spent convictions but only for the purpose of child related employment screening.

Essentially to prevent the misuse of information, safeguards have been included in the bill which will prevent the information being used for the purpose of general probity checks, other than in relation to working with children. Another essential safeguard under the COAG ar-
rangement is that this bill limits the release of this information to persons or bodies required or permitted by law to obtain or deal with this information. The disclosure and use of information received under the exchange will be subject to various safeguards and conditions. To reinforce the magnitude of these safeguards, before any person or body receiving the information is approved, the minister himself must be satisfied that they meet all of the safeguards in their jurisdiction.

Finally, given the sensitive nature of the information that will be available under the information exchange, a review of these amendments will be conducted after an initial trial to commence no later than 30 June 2011 and to be completed within three months. As I earlier stated, the object of all these amendments is to protect children from sexual, physical and emotional harm. Much research has been done and, as any parent knows, the abuse of a child is something that they carry with them forever and something that has significant impacts on our community. This week we offered our apology to the forgotten Australians. It is appropriate that this week we commit to this legislation to do whatever we possibly can to protect our children into the future. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (10.25 am)—I rise to speak in support of the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009 because the safety and security of children is undoubtedly the most important concern for parents. In fact, it should be a priority of governments at all levels. Nothing, quite frankly, is more important. Governments at both the state and federal levels need to do more beyond the rhetoric and this bill is a small step in that direction. Its main purpose is to strengthen criminal history checks for people working with children. I know that, generally speaking, as a society we do have to strike a balance and give people who have served their time the opportunity to perhaps be rehabilitated. But, at the same time it, is my strong personal view that when it comes to children we should not take any risks. They should not be the guinea pigs at the end of the line to see whether or not someone has been adequately rehabilitated. They are vulnerable. They are deserving of not just our guidance but our serious protection. We just cannot take the slightest chance when it comes to their safety. As a relatively new mother, I understand that and feel that with great intensity. No other parent is different from that.

People who work with children are afforded an extraordinary privilege but also a responsibility. Parents place enormous trust in them and it is incumbent upon governments to ensure that they can be confident that systems are in place to ensure that no-one who may not be suitable is given the responsibility and the entree of working with their children. I am sure that is an expectation that parents hold. Unfortunately, many state governments around the country in the administration of some of their departments and child protection do not take that responsibility seriously and do not provide adequate resources. We see the human tragedy resulting from that.

As shadow minister for early childhood education and child care, I am pleased that this bill—in ensuring that those who have a potential problem are prevented from working with children—will actually help protect the reputation and integrity of early childhood and child care professionals. We have some extraordinarily dedicated and talented people working in this industry across the country and in every corner of Australia. As I have visited childcare centres and preschools, I have met some remarkable people who are very passionate about their work and for whom, very often, remuneration is secondary. Indeed, they could go off...
and do other things and be paid more generously but they have a passion and a commitment to children and early childhood development. They do have a tough job. It is a very important job. I think it is appropriate to take this opportunity to thank all of those people who have a passion for working with young children—all the teachers, carers, social workers and others—and who help nurture and shape in such a positive way the future generation.

The aim of this bill, as I see it, is to reinforce the fact that safeguarding our children from physical, sexual and other forms of abuse must be a priority for law makers and governments. It implements the agreement that was reached at COAG on 29 November 2008 to enable the jurisdictional exchange of further criminal history information for people working with children. This agreement followed an agreement under the Howard government in April 2007 to a framework to improve access to interjurisdictional criminal history information by child related employment-screening schemes.

The current provisions in the Crimes Act do prevent the disclosure of a person’s full criminal history. The bill, however, does carve out an exception to these provisions, allowing for the interjurisdictional exchange of criminal history information, including information on pardon, quashed and spent convictions of those who work, or who seek to work, with children. The exchange of the information permitted by the bill will be subject to safeguards to ensure that the information is dealt with appropriately and to limit any potential misuse of information. The Minister for Home Affairs made assurances to the House in his introductory speech on 20 August 2009 to that effect. It is appropriate to consider a person’s full criminal history when assessing their appropriateness to work with children because, while there is a belief that people do deserve a second chance, in this case the safety of children is the first and primary priority.

While we are talking about police checks and criminal records, I want to take the opportunity to talk about the need to further protect children. In my view, we do need to strengthen sentences for those who commit crimes against children, particularly those who commit paedophilia. Unfortunately, we only tend to discuss the issue when it makes front-page news, like we did a few months back when convicted paedophile Dennis Ferguson was forced to move out of his latest abode. It is just a matter of time before we once again see an outraged local community—concerned mums and dads and grandparents—holding placards and rallying against having another Mr Ferguson as a neighbour. It has happened at least four times in the last five years, and the scene will be replayed over and over with this individual and with others.

Each time, we see public opinion divided into two camps: the larger one believing that this repeat offender ought not to be living in their community, certainly not near their children or where children go to school or play, and the smaller camp decrying this sort of vigilantism and claiming that the particular fellow—as it usually is—has a right to live in the community having done his time. Let us just stop for a moment and look at the concept of having done time: what does our society consider, not just through our laws but through the sentences imposed by judges, an appropriate sentence to fit the crime of sexually penetrating—let us call it what it is: raping—a small child, or three children?

I am sure many Australians would be disturbed to see how much time these people have to serve in jail if they are actually caught. This fellow planned his crime while doing time in Long Bay Gaol for a range of offences that include various assaults on children and indecent...
assaults on females. When he was released from jail, he and a partner tracked down a fellow inmate’s three children, aged six, seven and eight, abducted them from their home in Sydney, flew them to Brisbane and held them prisoner. He repeatedly raped them until the police arrived some days later. The judge in Ferguson’s trial said that the chances of rehabilitation were zero—zilch. He was sentenced to just 14 years—14 years for a crime that was so premeditated and so vile—a crime that no doubt, unfortunately, imposed a life sentence on the most vulnerable of victims, the three very small children.

Sadly, as we all know, this is not a one-off case. We appear to have a somewhat double standard when it comes to sexual offences. If they are perpetrated against an adult without their consent, it is an aggressive act and a very serious matter. If they are perpetrated against a child, it is less talked about; it is that molestation thing, that matter that we do not seem that comfortable talking about. The focus seems to shift to the sexual deviancy of the perpetrator and away from the victim.

While it is difficult to get a clear understanding of the sentencing for child rape vis-à-vis adult rape because many jurisdictions classify them all as sexual offences, there is evidence that we do not afford our children the same level of sentencing protection as we afford to adults. The Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council provides statistical information on sentencing. It found that in Victoria, from 2006-07 to 2007-08, the average effective sentence term for cases of sexual penetration of a child aged between 10 to 16 years was just 1.9 years for a single offence. It was just 3.3 years if the child was under the age of 10. In fact, if there had been up to 10 sexual offences committed against a child, those averages rose to just 4.8 and 5.2 years respectively. The median length of imprisonment for the rape of an adult was five years, with sentences varying from two to 20 years. I am not for one moment arguing that one crime is less heinous than the other. They are both abhorrent. But I do believe, and I am not alone in believing, that we have a very special duty of care to protect the most vulnerable in our community, and innocent, trusting children are very high on, if not at the top of, that list.

When I rose in parliament earlier this year to raise this issue, I pointed out that it is not something that people like to talk about, because they find it very disturbing and sometimes in polite company very distasteful. But it is a reality that we have to face, and as legislators even more so. It is estimated that, from an economic standpoint, child abuse costs our nation about $4 billion a year. The social price that we pay is, of course, much higher and the human cost is immeasurable. We see women who have been abused as children having a considerably higher risk of experiencing sexual violence in their adult life, more so than the rest of us, at 54 per cent compared with 26 per cent. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect is that the sexual offences that come to the attention of the police are only a very small proportion of the sexual offences that occur in our community. Sadly, most of our victims are victimised by someone they know, and this is a problem that also needs to be addressed. Tougher sentences certainly need to be looked at. The way that we view the crime of paedophilia needs to be rethought. The terminology we use to describe crimes against children should be much stronger. The outrage we as a community feel should not be confined just to a situation when a paedophile moves into our immediate neighbourhood. It needs to be a concern that is ongoing. Clearly the concepts of trust, protection and love within a family need to be reinforced in our society, and the value of children and good parenting needs to be supported.
We have seen the premature sexualisation of children in the media as a serious and growing issue. This does need to be examined, as does the trend to excuse unacceptable behaviour through moral relativism. We saw this recently with Hollywood rallying to absolve filmmaker Roman Polanski of his crime of having sex with a 13-year-old. So it is an uphill battle. We have the glamorous Hollywood protecting this sort of behaviour, and what sort of message does that send out to the community and to young people? So it is not a problem that has an easy, quick fix, but it is a problem that we need to acknowledge and discuss. This bill is a welcome and positive, albeit small, step in that direction.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (10.40 am)—I welcome the introduction of the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009. This bill implements the agreed reforms from the November 2008 COAG meeting which facilitate the interjurisdictional exchange of criminal history information for people working with children. This bill contains amendments to the Crimes Act 1914, which provides that a person whose conviction is spent, pardoned or quashed does not have to disclose the fact of the conviction. The act also prohibits others from disclosing the conviction without the person’s consent. The amendments to the Crimes Act create an exception for the convictions of persons who work or seek to work with children so that those convictions can be taken into account by Commonwealth, state and territory screening agencies in determining whether someone is suitable to work with children. These amendments will help protect children from sexual, physical and emotional abuse by permitting criminal history information to be disclosed and taken into account in assessing the suitability of someone to work with children.

Most decent-minded people would consider serious child abuse as a most abhorrent crime. They would find it incomprehensible, yet humanity’s record of protecting children is shameful. It would be considered one of mankind’s most serious failings. Whether it be child slavery or child soldiers—and I understand, according to United Nations figures, that right now there are some 300,000 child soldiers around the world—or sexual abuse of children, at times resulting in sexually motivated killings, or the forcible removal of children from their families, examples of child abuse span every generation, every country and every culture throughout the world. Even today, in a world that is better educated than ever before, child abuse throughout the world appears to be as prevalent as ever. What makes child abuse so repulsive is that those who commit the worst acts of child abuse are adults, who, having been children themselves, must surely understand the fear, the suffering and the hurt that they are inflicting. As with domestic violence, child abuse is one of those issues that many people refuse to talk about, accept or expose.

On a positive note, here in Australia more and more cases of child abuse are being exposed by authorities and the issue is being publicly discussed. That is a good thing. The National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect states that over 30,000 children are abused or neglected in Australia each year. One in three girls is sexually abused before the age of 18 years. One in seven boys is sexually abused before the age of 18 years. In 2007-08 there were 55,120 reports of child abuse and neglect substantiated by the child protection services. As staggering as these figures are, the reality is that so many more cases go unreported or unsubstantiated.

We will never really know the magnitude of the problem. What we do know is that the figures are trending upwards. In 2007-08 there were 31,166 young people in out-of-home care
living away from home for their own protection, a number which has doubled in the last decade. We are also seeing exposed offences against children perpetrated by family members or other individuals in positions of trust and authority who, over long periods of time, grossly abused their position of trust and children in their care—people who destroyed the lives of others and were able to continue reoffending because others failed to intervene. The protection of children is the responsibility of the whole community, of all members of society. Sadly, most child offenders are repeat offenders. For that reason the exchange of all police information, including spent information, about a person seeking to work with children will add another level of protection for children. It will be welcomed throughout the community. Conversely, not to do so and to then have further offences committed by that person against children would be unforgivable. Put simply, the benefit of any doubt in these matters should always be given to the children.

I note that the minister, in introducing this bill, referred to the many child abuse cases that are never successfully prosecuted, in order to protect the child victim from the stress and trauma of giving evidence. The conviction therefore fails and the criminal record does not exist. So, in a sense, in order to protect the child, we are having to protect the offender, and the offender gets off scot-free. It is my view that that kind of information should be made available between jurisdictions to authorities seeking information about a person who is intended to be placed in a role associated with children.

I will quote some statistics from the organisation Adults Surviving Child Abuse which demonstrate the devastating consequences that abuse as a child can have in someone’s adult life. Seventy-six per cent of adults who report child abuse are likely to suffer from one or more psychiatric disorder in their lifetime. Forty-five per cent of young homeless people report physical or sexual abuse as a factor in leaving home. One study found that 65 per cent of prisoners were victims of physical and sexual abuse as a child. People who suffer child abuse as a child are more likely to suffer mental illness and experience homelessness and drug and alcohol abuse as an adult. The suicide rate of young Australian survivors of child abuse is 10 to 13 times higher than the national rate. Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, I notice that you have a motion on the issue of suicide coming up before this parliament next week. I will be taking the opportunity to speak about that, but I commend you in raising that matter, because it is very much tied to this issue of child abuse. Most disturbingly of all, 30 per cent of people maltreated as children will in turn go on to maltreat others when they are adults. This leads to a cycle of child abuse across generations and throughout history, as I described before.

It is timely that we are discussing this bill at a time that the nation has issued an apology to the forgotten Australians and the child migrants. That apology was the right thing to do. It was long overdue and it will acknowledge and give credibility to the sufferings of the forgotten Australians. It also highlights that, as a society, we must remain forever vigilant to the incidence of child abuse. Hardly a day passes without a new case being reported in the media. I want to quote from a couple of media articles. The first is an article by Mark Metherell and Adele Horin. In the article, those two journalists say:

The number of youngsters aged under 18 on care and protection orders has soared to 34,279, up 37 per cent in the three years to 2008, says the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s biennial report on welfare.
The number of cases notified to agencies in 2007-08 was 195,387, of which NSW was responsible for 103,355.

That was an article in today’s paper. This is what is being reported right now.

A report by Ainslie MacGibbon, on 29 October 2009, quotes Associate Professor Warwick Middleton, who is a specialist in trauma related syndromes and has been director of the trauma and dissociation unit at Belmont Hospital in Brisbane for 13 years. Professor Middleton says that shocking cases of long-term sexual abusers like Josef Fritzl are far more common than widely believed. Most of us have heard and read the accounts of Josef Fritzl but, according to Professor Middleton, those cases are far more common and prevalent than we understand. He says:

… the abuse usually starts at about three years of age, and I see women who are 50 still being abused by the same person. It is typical of this group to experience anywhere between 2000 and 10,000 abusive acts over a lifetime.

He estimates that about one in 1,000 people experience incestuous abuse into adulthood. Those figures are certainly alarming, if nothing else. It just highlights the magnitude of a problem that is generally swept under the carpet by society.

Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, as a fellow South Australian, you would be familiar with the South Australian Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry into child abuse by Commissioner Ted Mullighan that commenced in 2004. His 600-page report, with 54 recommendations, was tabled in state parliament on 1 April 2008. I want to quote from the findings of that report and also from a press statement put out on the day that the report was tabled in state parliament. The statement by Commissioner Ted Mullighan reads:

Many people told me it was the first time they had ever disclosed the sexual abuse, and that they had been ashamed and embarrassed for their whole lives. To have the chance to tell their story, and be believed for the first time, was an enormous relief.

This statement highlights just how many people must live with the torment of having been abused but never talk about it. Perhaps the abuse affects their way of life thereafter—I am sure it does. Perhaps it is brought out in different ways but they never talk about it. Sadly, they do have to live with it. What is just as concerning is that those who cause the abuse might continue to abuse. I quoted the figures of the people who have been abused as children and who, as adults, are still being abused. It is remarkable to try and understand that.

I said earlier that the responsibility for children lies with all of us. This responsibility does not just lie with government or any particular department of government; it is a responsibility that all in society should bear. In that respect, I want to talk very briefly about a program that is currently underway in my electorate of Makin—the Salisbury Communities for Children program. This is an example of how a community can come together to try and prevent child abuse. It is an example of people working together to improve the lives of children in their community. The Salisbury Communities for Children program is also often referred to as FamilyZone. These FamilyZone hubs facilitate the prevention of child abuse and neglect by bringing families together with a range of support services for families with children up to five years of age.

Salisbury Communities for Children was established around the idea that effective early childhood intervention is about supporting not only the children themselves but also their parents, their neighbourhoods and the broader community. What began as a playgroup that met
three days per week at the Salvation Army Ingle Farm in 2005 became two support centres for young families in the northern suburbs. The FamilyZone support centres located at Ingle Farm and Para Hills provide a range of initiatives for children and families. These include parent education, community play areas, young mum support groups and specific programs for new arrivals, such as English classes, and dedicated support groups for families of Afghani and African backgrounds. FamilyZone hubs work in partnership with the relevant federal, state and local government agencies, including health, community and education services, and also non-government organisations. As well as educating parents, Salisbury Communities for Children has partnered with the University of South Australia and TAFE South Australia to provide early childhood leadership training courses for early childhood professionals.

The excellent work being carried out by Karl Brettig and his team at the Salisbury Communities for Children provides the nurturing environment that all young children need and deserve. I have attended their centres, I have seen the work they do, I have spoken to the parents and I have spoken to Mr Brettig about the programs. They also provide information and support that allows adults to be better parents for their children. Salisbury Communities for Children centre is very highly regarded by parents and families throughout the community, and this is evidenced by the increase in community participation in, and the always strong demand for, the programs since the centre was established in 2005.

I raise that as an example of how communities can collectively take a responsibility to ensure that children, wherever they might be, are given the protection they quite rightly deserve, and sometimes need. Through communities working together, issues and risks can be exposed by ways other than waiting for the child to come forward and talk about it. The right intervention can then take place. I commend Karl and his team for their work. I note that Karl has been asked to go and speak about child safety measures at a conference in Western Australia this week because of the success of that program. I certainly commend it to other communities. This is a bill that will be welcomed by the community. I certainly welcome it. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (10.55 am)—in reply—I thank members for their contributions to the debate and I thank all members, including opposition members, for their support of the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009. I appreciate the passion with which members have spoken about their desire to protect our children from abuse. The member for Indi suggested that penalties for child sex related offences should be increased. I recently released a discussion paper proposing a range of enhancements to Commonwealth child sex related offences, including increases in penalties for certain offences and the introduction of new higher penalty aggravated offences.

I would like to clarify the comments by member for Cowan about the reasons for taking into account pardoned and quashed convictions. A person whose conviction has been pardoned or quashed is held to be innocent of the offence with which he or she was charged and tried. Some members commented on the requirements for working with children checks in states and territories. This bill does not affect those existing requirements for individuals who work with children to obtain a check in the state and territory in which they are employed. The bill is designed to enhance the effectiveness of those checks by allowing the provision of
a broader range of Commonwealth criminal history information to state and territory screening units that undertake child related employment screening.

Nevertheless, pardoned and quashed convictions may be relevant to an assessment of a person’s suitability to work with children because of the surrounding factual circumstances in the particular case. Protecting children from any form of abuse is a matter of utmost importance for this government. The statistics tell us that the risk of abuse to children is significant. This bill will enhance the mechanisms in place to ensure that people who work with children are properly vetted. The Council of Australian Governments recognised that the assessment of criminal history is an integral aspect in making decisions about whether a person may pose a risk to children.

The bill implements the COAG commitment to enable the interjurisdictional exchange of expanded criminal history information for people working with children. This bill will enable organisations conducting working with children checks to consider the full criminal history of a person. This includes considering non-conviction information such as court records. The bill includes stringent safeguards to ensure that the information is dealt with appropriately and to limit any potential misuse of the information. We must take all steps to protect our children. This bill will enhance our overall strategy for managing risks to the safety and wellbeing of children. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

COMMITTEES

Intelligence and Security Committee

Report

Debate resumed from 17 November, on motion by Mr Dreyfus:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (10.59 am)—This report was tabled yesterday, and it is the review by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security of the relisting of the Hamas Brigades; the PKK, which is known as the Kurdistan Workers Party; the organisation Lashkar-e-Tayyiba; and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. I speak to this report in the absence of the chair, Arch Bevis, who is away with a delegation. I participated in the deliberations and I speak to the report, and I take the opportunity of thanking my colleagues and also the secretariat staff for their work in the preparation of this report.

The recommendations were that all four organisations, which have been found to be terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code, should not be the subject of a disallowance resolution by either this or the other house of parliament. In that context, I speak to recommendations which reflect the view that the committee formed: that each of these organisations remain listed terrorist organisations. As part of the process, I note that proscription of terrorist organisations requires a very high level of examination and cooperation, and it crosses political boundaries.

Members would note on page 4 of the report that the Prime Minister wrote to the premiers of states and to all chief ministers advising of the intention to relist each of these organisa-
tions, and positive replies were received in each case. In that context, I note that the matters were largely without contest except in two matters. One involved the Hamas Brigades, where there was contest—an assumption by one of the people who wanted to give evidence to the committee, a Mr Judeh, who came to a view that if you found information on the internet, that was all that was necessary to form conclusions. I just wish to say that he contested much of the information presented by ASIO on the basis that it was information published on the internet, and he presented voluminous amounts of his own open source data—equally collected from the internet—and because they were juxtaposed he came to a view that proscription should not occur. I would simply make the point, and it was made in the committee’s conclusions, that whilst statements of reasons often refer to open source documents, importantly they state that information provided while publicly available has been corroborated by classified information. This was a matter that the committee tested in coming to a view that the Hamas Brigades should be still listed as a terrorist organisation. I note that that is not the whole of the Hamas organisation that is proscribed.

The other matter in which there was some contest was in relation to the PKK—the Kurdistan Workers Party. There were people who represented Kurdish organisations in Australia, and they put to us some of their concerns about relisting of that organisation. The committee in its report makes the very strong point that the relisting of the PKK is in no way meant as a comment on Australians of Kurdish descent. It is of concern to the committee to have Australians of Kurdish background believing that they are in a position of being lesser citizens or persecuted, but the committee fully accepts that, while members of the Kurdish community may wholeheartedly support the PKK’s political and ideological objectives, they oppose terrorism. In fact, when we had the witnesses before us, we examined that issue at some length, because we did identify, from the material that was available to us, that the PKK was an organisation that had been involved in violent acts in the period 2006-09, and that is outlined in the report.

The issue that arose in some of the evidence given before us was whether the PKK may now be changing its modus operandi. That was an issue of considerable interest to us. The evidence that we received, particularly from ASIO, was that there is still a large chunk of the organisation that adheres to the use of terrorist activities to get its point across, and its ideology. In our discussion with the security organisation, it was clear that they would reconsider the listing of this organisation if it substantially changed its modus operandi. There were some interesting developments that we canvassed in the report involving the pardoning of certain people in relation to offences that had occurred in Turkey. From our perspective, while engagement in peace and mediation was useful, until there is clear evidence that the organisation has changed, that should not be a matter that would influence our judgment.

I want to conclude by simply saying that, in relation to this question as to whether or not a state such as Turkey may have reacted in a way which those who engage in terrorism believe might justify that activity, in my examination of some of the representatives of Kurdish organisations, I put this proposition. I referred to the statement of reasons and I said that it lists conduct from 13 September 1996 until March this year, conduct which involves what the Attorney-General has described as terrorist activity. I said, ‘It seems to me that you are not contesting that this has in fact happened. I think that makes our task very difficult. I would simply
say that if what you are arguing is that activity of that sort is not justified because of what the Turks are doing, I do not regard that as an appropriate response.’

I simply make the point that when you are dealing with terrorist organisations it is sometimes more difficult when there are people of a particular ethnicity here in Australia who support some of the ideological positions that organisations take. Their presence here cannot be seen in any way as condoning terrorists. I think that is the fundamental issue. The committee did test these matters very fully with the community people involved. They would not be surprised that we recommend that the proscription of the PKK not be disallowed, but they did have an opportunity to put their views and they were heard. We put strongly the view that terrorism, wherever it occurs, cannot be condoned and that we have to act in relation to those issues.

I thank my colleagues on the committee for their continued work in relation to dealing with these very important and sensitive issues. I welcome the opportunity to have been able to speak to this report.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (11.09 am)—by leave—Yesterday there was tabled in the House the report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security concerning a review of the relisting of Hamas Brigades, PKK, LeT and PIJ as terrorist organisations. In every case they are relistings, these being organisations that have been proscribed for quite some time.

I want to deal, in particular, with the relisting of the Hamas brigades as a proscribed organisation under section 102 of the Criminal Code. Perhaps before going to that it is worth noting that this is a process that the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security has undertaken, under the functions conferred on it by the legislation, for several years. It is my view that the committee performs an invaluable function in doing so because it provides a degree of publicness about a process which would otherwise take place almost entirely behind closed doors. In deciding to list, the Attorney-General relies on the advice of the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation. The Attorney-General publishes a statement of reasons. The committee, in being able to hold a hearing, in being able to receive submissions from interested members of the public, is able to review the decision and make a recommendation in respect of it. For every organisation, by holding such a hearing and receiving submissions the committee is able to satisfy, at least to some degree, public interest in a process which concerns all.

Particularly in relation to Hamas it is worth noting—and the committee has made comment about this in the report—that what has been listed is the Hamas Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which is the armed or military wing of the Hamas organisation and, as the committee has noted in the report, Hamas itself—that is, the political organisation—is not being listed. It is a distinction that, for the moment, is worth persisting with because, despite the basis of Hamas, despite its history, even now it is to be hoped that Hamas will renounce the approach that it has taken ever since it was founded in 1987, which is a complete commitment to violence and, indeed, a commitment to the destruction of a member state of the United Nations, namely Israel. It is a fact that Hamas, not itself making a great deal of distinction between the political organisation and the brigades, has for years carried out acts of violence, targeting civilians. It is apparent that, as I speak, Hamas remains committed to carrying out such acts.
Just to reiterate—the report goes into some of these details—it is worth noting that Hamas has, in the last several years, fired thousands of rockets at Israeli towns, at civilian centres. Indeed, Hamas rockets, rockets for which the brigades have taken direct responsibility after the event, have fallen on schools, kindergartens and houses throughout Israel. Some 4,000 to 5,000 rockets have been launched since 2007 alone, when the Hamas organisation took control of Gaza in a violent coup. It can also be noted that Hamas has launched these rocket attacks from schools and from mosques in Gaza and, therefore, there should not be any doubt about the nature of the brigades, the organisation that has been listed here.

It is worth noting that Hamas is still holding an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas operatives kidnapped in 2007 from Israeli territory, killing two IDF soldiers at the time. Hamas has held Shalit for more than three years, denying him access to the Red Cross and all other representatives.

It is also the case that indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas has killed or wounded several Palestinians within Gaza, that the firing of rockets by Hamas has damaged UN facilities and that, in every sense, it is right to describe Hamas as a true terrorist organisation. It engages in indiscriminate destruction of life and property.

The Hamas charter, which was adopted in 1988, has never been altered. It has never been renounced by the Hamas organisation. It commits Hamas to establishing an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East. It rejects the approach of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to the current conflict in Israel. It is a rejection of democracy. Hamas rejects democratic methods and rejects human rights. It rejects the rights of trade unions. It rejects the rights of women as those rights are understood and cherished by Western countries such as ours. What appears in the report of the parliamentary joint committee is but a small sample of the acts in which the Hamas brigades have engaged in recent years.

There is ample evidence of the treatment of political opponents of Hamas in the Gaza Strip including murder, knee-capping and throwing its political opponents off buildings. There was a particularly egregious example of the conduct of the brigades in August this year when Hamas suppressed what it saw as an insurrection in a mosque in Rafah. There had been a sermon suggesting that Hamas was not Islamist enough and that was met by an armed attack in which the brigade surrounded this mosque in Rafah firing rocket grenades into the mosque killing more than 20 Palestinians, including an 11-year-old girl.

There is no doubt that Hamas and the brigades, as its armed wing, completely reject all that is known or understood about human rights in this country or throughout Western countries. There is a totalitarian approach taken to all media and to all education. There is a continuation of the glorification of suicide bombing and encouragement of children to become martyrs. That is the nature of the organisation that is here being relisted. It is why the parliamentary joint committee—rightly—has recommended that that relisting be endorsed.

The other matter I want to raise in relation to the Hamas organisation is to record my regret at some of the submissions that the parliamentary joint committee received in relation to whether or not the Hamas brigades should be relisted.

I might just say something else about the process that the parliamentary joint committee uses. As is made clear not only in relation to the Hamas brigades organisation but also in relation to all of the other organisations which are dealt with in this report, ASIO provides mate-
rial to the Attorney-General and that material which is provided to the Attorney-General is reflected in ASIO’s statement of reasons. That is, of course, a public document and, naturally enough, is based on material which is able to be made openly available or open source type material as is recorded in the committee’s report. That information, which is contained in the publicly available statement of reasons, has also been corroborated by classified information in all senses.

But Hamas, perhaps differently to some of the other organisations listed here, is itself an organisation which prides itself on publicity. There is a wealth of information available about the activities of the Hamas brigades. It is available to anyone in Australia who has even a passing interest in events in the Middle East. What was of surprise and indeed concern to me was to see that in some of the submissions that were received by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, rather than dealing with the matter which was before the committee, which was whether or not to endorse the relisting of the Hamas brigades, these submissions instead engaged in precisely the same attack that Hamas itself is engaged in, which is to attack a member state of the United Nations, namely Israel.

The committee—rightly, having received various submissions along these lines—rejected the submissions insofar as they sought to attack the state of Israel. There is no part of the process that the committee hearings are involved in which required the committee to look at the conduct of the state of Israel. To do so is almost to accept the false justification that is sometimes advanced for the terrorist actions of organisations like the Hamas Brigades. The committee rightly rejected that approach.

The parliament should be under no illusions that the task that is conferred on the committee is to review the available evidence and to hear from members of the public who might have information to provide to the committee or views as to whether or not a particular organisation ought be listed. The task before the committee is not to allow its processes to be hijacked into some kind of attack on the state of Israel or any other member state of the United Nations; it is rather to consider the actual activities of the proscribed organisations to judge whether they have engaged in terrorist activities. There can be no doubt whatsoever that Hamas, by any measure, is a terrorist organisation. It, indeed, proudly and openly carries on its own activities as a terrorist organisation. It is right that the committee has made the recommendation that it has, which was not to recommend the disallowance of the regulations which listed the Hamas Brigades. I commend the report to the House.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (11.21 am)—I am pleased to support the recommendations of this report. Even though I am not a member of the intelligence committee, I think that, as the member for Isaacs said, the process of the committee evaluating these organisations is a worthwhile process that this parliament should be involved in, partially because it gives the Australian public a feeling of transparency which they duly deserve and an ability to have input into how the Australian government makes decisions about these particular organisations. Originally, it was proposed that the Attorney-General alone have the right to list these organisations and that at some later period that would be sunsetted and reconsidered. This is a better process where both the Attorney-General and the parliament are involved in the serious task of proscribing these terrorist organisations.

I find strange some of the submissions that, according to the report, were made supporting the delisting of terrorist organisations, but I will return to that in a moment. I first of all want
to support the relisting of not just Hamas but also Lashkar-e-Taiba, particularly because of that organisation’s disgraceful role in trying to engender terrorist incidents against Australians and because of their murder of two of our countrymen in Mumbai in the attacks on that very fine Indian city last year. I must report my own countersuggestibility. After Lashkar-e-Taiba attacked the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower hotel amongst the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, my daughter and I stayed there some months later, perhaps in a minor act of solidarity with the people of India.

The argument being made by many people is that Hamas is a legitimate political organisation. Indeed, there is an attempt in 2.26 of the committee’s listings to say that there is a difference between its legitimate political and social activities and its terrorist activities. I think that is a convenient argument that our security services put. Unfortunately for those who make that argument, Hamas does not make that argument. Sheikh Yasin and Mr Rantisi, the previous leaders of Hamas, were clearly the people giving orders for various terrorist attacks, and they made no distinction between the civilian and military wings of that organisation.

As the member for Isaacs rightly said, this is an organisation that took power by force in Gaza and its rule of brutality there is something that is clearly alien to Australians. Very interestingly, since the conflict in Gaza in January this year the support for that organisation has, not surprisingly, dropped. The Ramallah based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research said that Hamas would receive only 28 per cent of the votes if there were to be elections now whereas the rival Fatah organisation had increased to 44 per cent. That might be the reason why Hamas, so earnestly promoted by the international reporter from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mr Paul McGeough, has absolutely ruled out the possibility of further elections in Gaza.

If we look at the political issues beyond the prescription issues in this report for peace in the Middle East—the unification of the Palestinian side in negotiations is seen as impossible because of the differences between Hamas and Fatah—we would come to the conclusion that we must earnestly support elections in Gaza as soon as possible because the Palestinian people themselves would then be able to elect representative and more moderate organisations that would be able to include negotiations with the Israeli side. The statement recently made by Hamas’s interior ministry that it ‘will hold accountable anyone involved in elections’ is an ominous threat that I think says something about the nature of the Hamas organisation. Mr McGeough and other people who are apologists for Hamas have said that it is a political organisation that will morph into an organisation that can be negotiated with. However, its foreign based leader, Khaled Meshaal, in Damascus in October this year, talking about negotiations for a proposed two state solution peace settlement, said:

We must say: Palestine from the sea to the river, from the west to the occupied east, and it must be liberated. As long as there is occupation, there will be resistance to occupation.

Let me decode for this house what that means. That means there are not, as Australia originally voted for in the United Nations in 1948, two states—a Palestinian state next to an Israeli state. Hamas demands an Islamic state like Gaza from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. You can understand how the bikini-clad women of Tel Aviv on the beaches, the people who participate in gay rights demonstrations in Jerusalem, the normal people of the Israeli Jewish state—middle-class, small ‘l’ liberal, just like us in Australia—would fiercely resist living under a sixth century Islamist fanatic state. They have my entire support and I think they have
the support of most of the democratic world for resisting that. Until Hamas can be brought to some kind of reality then they and their apologists, in my view, are out of the negotiating game. That is no reason for stopping negotiating with entirely reasonable Palestinian Arab political organisations. As the member for Oxley knows, I recently had the pleasure of participating, under the auspices of the Australian Workers Union, in a TULIP function at the ALP national conference with Mr Issa, the Palestinian representative in Canberra. He is a very engaging and moderate gentleman who, to misquote Margaret Thatcher talking about Mr Gorbachev, is 'a man who we can do with business with'.

Let me turn my remarks to the organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba, which the committee recommends stays proscribed. As the committee's report says, a number of members of Lashkar-e-Taiba have been arrested in Australia. People from this organisation, who have been jailed in other countries, have come to Australia, including Willie Brigitte. I note that a number of people who have subsequently been let out of jail, such as Mr Hicks and others, were involved in training at Lashkar-e-Taiba camps. This seems to be the dedicated part of the international al-Qaeda franchise, which is concentrating on Australia. People who have been arrested and charged in Sydney, such as Mr Brigitte, have been trained and organised by this particular arm of al-Qaeda.

There are implications for Australia in the report of the Calcutta Telegraph on Monday, which noted a Pakistani-American mapped out all the Mumbai target sites of Lashkar-e-Taiba, including the Jewish centre, Chabad House. Sinisterly, he posed as an American Jew. His name is Dawood Jilani. He changed his name. He is a US national. He was nearly arrested by the FBI. He went to India and scoped all of these sites that were to be attacked. We have to be very alive to the possibility of precisely this kind of person coming to Australia. On 3 October 2009, Jilani was arrested on federal charges in the US of plotting to commit terrorist acts on overseas targets, including facilities and employees at a Danish newspaper, for the cartoons that they had published. So Lashkar-e-Taiba remains an active concern to this country. We have had a number of people who have been arrested, charged with working with Lashkar-e-Taiba and convicted.

I commend the parliament for continuing to list these organisations and for the laws under which these people have been convicted. I commend the security services—the Federal Police, ASIO and others—who have been able to bring evidence. I commend the courts, which, despite their many small 'l' liberal inclinations, have convicted people who have rightly been brought to them under these kinds of charges. The parliament performs an important process for the Australian people in making sure that we go through and examine all of these organisations systematically, carefully and rationally. We have to do that as long as these people are targeting this country and other organisations and democratic countries around the world. I was very pleased to hear the member for Berowra say that the Attorney-General had written to all state attorneys-general and had their support for the continued listing of these organisations.

I was astonished to see that the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) made a submission to this inquiry calling for the delisting of Hamas as a terror organisation. I hope the submission was duly discussed by that organisation. Community legal centres, in my understanding, look after people in Australia who are the oppressed of the earth and do not necessarily have the ability to fund legal defences for themselves. The Federation of Community

MAIN COMMITTEE
Legal Centres look after people on pensions or in deprived circumstances who do not have the resources to find solicitors. They represent them on matters that we in a civilised society have determined everyone should be represented on. For them to be making representations to the parliament on behalf of terrorist organisations and saying that they should have the listings lifted is something far beyond their brief. It would be an outrage to most Victorian taxpayers who rightly fund legal centres for the 99 per cent of good work they do. I urge the organisations involved to make sure they know what they are doing before they come to the federal parliament and start getting involved in national and international politics which is far beyond their purview.

I end by making the regrettable point that I was with the Minister for Home Affairs in my electorate of Melbourne Ports when he announced special security funding for various schools in my electorate. The security funding was a direct result of reports like this. In January, the leader of the Hamas organisation in Gaza, Mahmoud Zahar, made the threat that, because of the killing of children in Palestine, they had legitimised their people’s killing of our people all over the world. This was considered by many people in Australia, the United States and Europe to be a threat by Hamas to carry out terrorist action in Australia and all over the world. Through this report, the parliament and the Australian government, by other measures, is taking every necessary step to protect the security of the Australian people. *(Time expired)*

Debate (on motion by Mr Ripoll) adjourned.

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS

Debate resumed from 16 November, on motion by Ms Macklin:

That the House support the apology given on this day by the Prime Minister, on behalf of the nation, to the Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants in the following terms:

We come together today to deal with an ugly chapter in our nation’s history.

And we come together today to offer our nation’s apology.

To say to you, the Forgotten Australians, and those who were sent to our shores as children without your consent, that we are sorry.

Sorry – that as children you were taken from your families and placed in institutions where so often you were abused.

Sorry – for the physical suffering, the emotional starvation and the cold absence of love, of tenderness, of care.

Sorry – for the tragedy of childhoods lost – childhoods spent instead in austere and authoritarian places, where names were replaced by numbers, spontaneous play by regimented routine, the joy of learning by the repetitive drudgery of menial work.

Sorry – for all these injustices to you as children, who were placed in our care.

As a nation, we must now reflect on those who did not receive proper care.

We look back with shame that many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and nobody to whom to turn.

We look back with shame that many of these little ones who were entrusted to institutions and foster homes – instead, were abused physically, humiliated cruelly and violated sexually.

We look back with shame at how those with power were allowed to abuse those who had none.

And how then, as if this was not injury enough, you were left ill-prepared for life outside – left to fend for yourselves; often unable to read or write; to struggle alone with no friends and no family.
For these failures to offer proper care to the powerless, the voiceless and the most vulnerable, we say sorry.

We reflect too today on the families who were ripped apart, simply because they had fallen on hard times.

Hard times brought about by illness, by death and by poverty.

Some simply left destitute when fathers, damaged by war, could no longer cope.

Again we say sorry for the extended families you never knew.

We acknowledge the particular pain of children shipped to Australia as child migrants - robbed of your families, robbed of your homeland, regarded not as innocent children but regarded instead as a source of child labour.

To those of you who were told you were orphans, brought here without your parents’ knowledge or consent, we acknowledge the lies you were told, the lies told to your mothers and fathers, and the pain these lies have caused for a lifetime.

To those of you separated on the dockside from your brothers and sisters; taken alone and unprotected to the most remote parts of a foreign land – we acknowledge today the laws of our nation failed you.

And for this we are deeply sorry.

We think also today of all the families of these Forgotten Australians and former child migrants who are still grieving, families who were never reunited, families who were never reconciled, families who were lost to one another forever.

We reflect too on the burden that is still carried by your own children, your grandchildren, your husbands, your wives, your partners and your friends – and we thank them for the faith, the love and the depth of commitment that has helped see you through the valley of tears that was not of your making.

And we reflect with you as well, in sad remembrance, on those who simply could not cope and who took their own lives in absolute despair.

We recognise the pain you have suffered.

Pain so personal.

Pain so profoundly disabling.

So, let us therefore, together, as a nation, allow this apology to begin healing this pain.

Healing the pain felt by so many of the half a million of our fellow Australians and those who as children were in our care.

And let us also resolve this day, that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation’s story.

A turning point for shattered lives.

A turning point for Governments at all levels and of every political colour and hue, to do all in our power to never let this happen again.

For the protection of children is the sacred duty of us all.

Dr Jensen (Tangney) (11.37 am)—In speaking to this motion on the forgotten Australians and former child migrants, I will continue the speech I was making on Monday evening. In a written statement given to me, Mrs Pollard says ‘I needed to show the church and the government what a horrible mess they had made of providing protection to me and my siblings’. In 1994 Mrs Pollard reported the rape to the WA police and the following year she went to Rockhampton and went through a hearing against the priest. She says, ‘I faced up to
my abuser and he was committed to trial.’ The trial was in 1999 and, despite one of the jurors knowing the priest’s brother, the trial went ahead, resulting in a hung jury. In 2000 there was a second trial, which resulted in a guilty verdict and a sentence of 7½ years for the priest. Mrs Pollard continues:

The judge also recommended that the Queensland government pay me the maximum ex gratia payment. There was an appeal and the priest’s lawyers took the case to the Mental Health Court. During this period all the court documents were sent to my husband. I was so angry that this was done as I saw it as a last ditch attempt to prevent the course of justice, because if I had all the transcripts of a closed court case it would be impossible for the case to go ahead. At no time did I ever request the Queensland government to release this information to my husband or to me.

Crown law placed a suppression order on Mrs Pollard and she could not even speak to her lawyer about them. She had to appear in court without legal representation.

At this point, let us hear ex-Premier Beattie’s version, which he related in a ministerial statement to parliament on 27 February 2003. According to Mr Beattie, a policy officer in his department released transcripts of the closed proceedings out of some sympathy for Mrs Pollard. Mr Beattie refers to Mrs Pollard once as ‘one of the victims in this case’, but then quickly changed his terminology to a self-serving ‘that is, one of the witnesses who gave evidence at the hearing’. Mrs Pollard was, and still is, a victim, yet in his ministerial statement the former Queensland Premier, to his eternal shame, attempted to portray Mrs Pollard as somehow to blame for the error emanating from his office. He said:

I have taken this action because despite repeated requests, including requests in writing, the Perth couple have refused to return the transcripts or to cease contacting witnesses mentioned in the transcript.

Mrs Pollard has repeatedly denied having deliberately contacted other victims. So what does that say about Premier Beattie’s statement? Was it an unfortunate error or one of the most contemptible blame-shifting exercises I have ever come across? Premier Beattie apologised to other victims but Mrs Pollard said he never apologised to her. She said, ‘Yet I was the one who had been dragged through three trials in an effort to make the system accountable for something they already knew was happening.’ She continued, ‘The evidence I now hold from having all the records show to me the Queensland government always knew how bad this institution was and knew that no child should ever have been placed there.’ So why didn’t the Pollards return the documents to the Queensland government, even if they were not at fault? Perhaps they were concerned about Queensland’s questionable record for protecting government documents, especially when they relate to the government’s handling of child abuse cases.

There has been a deal of public debate about the so-called Heiner ‘shreddergate affair’. A document tabled in the Queensland parliament by Lawrence Springborg on 17 April 2002 entitled, The 1997 Lindeberg declaration revisited, said:

However, over and above those unresolved matters, Mr Grundy, in a six-month intensive investigative exposé in 2001, discovered that evidence of criminal paedophilia was gathered by Mr Heiner concerning the (hitherto publicly-unknown) pack-rape of a 14-year-old Aboriginal female inmate by four male inmates during a supervised educational bush outing in May 1988 which certain Centre staff claimed was covered up at the time by Centre and departmental management.

The document continued:
Against this background, on 5 March 1990, the Goss Government ordered the shredding so that the evidence gathered could not be used against the careers of JOCY Youth Workers, some of whom, on the face of available evidence, were engaging in prima facie criminal conduct against children held in the care and custody of the State in flagrant dereliction of their duty of care, and, perhaps, engaging in a criminal conspiracy to pervert the course of justice in covering up the crime of criminal paedophilia.

Reports such as these may explain why the Pollards felt a certain reluctance to hand back such valuable documents. The Pollards have told me that they have tried all sorts of avenues to get justice in this case. This is including the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Ombudsman without any success. They have told me that the main thing they want is not just an acknowledgement that these terrible things occurred, but a full and proper inquiry to find out once and for all who was at fault. Most of the relevant documents are publicly available and Mr Pollard has repeatedly offered copies to anyone who is interested.

Who is responsible for the suffering of my constituent, Sandra Pollard, and so many other vulnerable young children at the hands of uncaring people? Who ultimately should bear the responsibility for all these well-documented cases of systemic and systematic abuse, which continued virtually unabated for years? Mrs Pollard has letters from politicians and judges saying how much she has helped other abuse victims, and, ‘how much this bravery on my part has cost me both emotionally and financially.’ Despite the appalling treatment she suffered for so many years and the perceived lack of justice for Mrs Pollard, she has managed to help her son go to university and to rebuild her life with a loving husband, and to help fellow abuse victims. The least we can do for people such as Sandra Pollard is give her procedural justice.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (11.44 am)—On Monday, 16 November I began my day by going to three separate places to collect and escort to parliament, very proudly, Debra Lowe and her young son, Chris; Graham Wilson; Tina Coutts; and Barbara Lane and her young daughters, Sarah and Danielle. Ian Mackay, our driver, was lovely, showing these forgotten Australians the respect and care they so deserved, particularly on Monday.

I did it in two shifts—everyone had luggage, and I teased Graham for having the biggest suitcase. I said to him, ‘I can go around the world with one four times smaller,’ but it was all in good spirit, despite all the feelings that the day had evoked, would evoke and would continue to evoke. It is something that forgotten Australians and child migrants had long asked for. It is a shame that they had to ask for it, but that is how it is sometimes when we are dealing with what was, as the Prime Minister called it, ‘an ugly chapter in our history’.

But Monday was not the day to dwell on some of that. The Prime Minister said that an apology would be given some time back, and for that I say thank you on behalf of all the forgotten Australians, particularly in my area. I ran into Roger Green and his wife Dorothy, constituents of mine, while we were waiting in the queue. So anxious was everybody to get inside the Great Hall for the apology, and so anxious were they to get down the front and be there, that a queue formed. There was morning tea and all of the things happening and people talking, but they just wanted to get inside. I stood in that queue with them, and it was just wonderful meeting so many different people and having snippets of conversation with all sorts of people in the queue and sharing experiences as well.

My electorate office manager, Carmel Cook, was also there helping but her father was a child migrant so she was feeling a whole lot of feelings, as everybody else was, but at the same time helping to look after other people, along with me. It was a really emotional day on
Monday, and it was a very draining day. I know it brought me to tears, and I can only in a very small way comprehend how the forgotten Australians and the child migrants and their families were feeling sitting there on that day.

There were some people who desperately wanted to come and be here on Monday. Other people did not want to come—for all sorts of reasons. I have people in my electorate who are really ambivalent about it, and one friend in particular. It brought up feelings for him. He wanted to see all of the recommendations out of the two Senate reports implemented straightaway with the apology. The apology was one of those, and from where I sit I said to everyone, ‘I would love it to be perfect. I would love it if we could do the absolute Rolls-Royce treatment, but that will not happen on the day. The fact is that we are doing the apology, and it is a good start.’ That was the overwhelming feeling for everybody there and for people around the country on this particular day. People left feeling that at last they were believed, they were listened to, they were included and they were able, for some, to start to heal.

I am not speaking for everybody because everybody’s experience is different. But how can a young child not be damaged in some way by being in institutions where, as the Prime Minister said, it was just loveless: there was no love, there was no nurturing and there was no caring. We heard stories about people waiting and looking at gates, waiting for people to come back, but there was nobody coming to rescue them, suffering as they did. They did not have one adult in their lives who could protect them and who could believe them. If you grow up without that trust and nurturing, it must be incredibly challenging and difficult to find your place in society, to feel included and then go on yourself to try and parent and have relationships.

I felt really privileged to be sitting with Tina, Graham, Deb, Barbara, Carmel, Chris, Sarah and Danielle and another man whom we met there. He was alone—it was clear that he was alone—and we asked him to join us, which he did. And I have had a lovely follow-up email from him. I then moved into the House where Minister Macklin moved a formal motion of apology—the one to which I am currently speaking. She spoke very passionately, as did other speakers, about the forgotten Australians. I note here the very honourable member for Swan, Steve Irons, himself a forgotten Australian, who spoke to the motion. He spoke to and about his brother, who was sitting in the public gallery, and said that they had been separated for over 30 years. It was very moving. The honourable member for Swan, Steve Irons, himself a forgotten Australian, who spoke to the motion. He spoke to and about his brother, who was sitting in the public gallery, and said that they had been separated for over 30 years. It was very moving. The honourable member for Swan is such a nice person and so liked, and it was nice to have the opportunity to hear him speak. There were people in the gallery from CLAN, Forgotten Australians and the Child Migrant Trust. Also present in the gallery was former Senator Andrew Murray. Many people, of course, have been involved in recognising the forgotten Australians and child migrants but Andrew Murray, more than any other person in this place, deserves special mention for the work that he did in the Senate. Senators Jan McLucas and Claire Moore also did a lot of work in this area. It was a very moving time.

I have been having quite a few meetings in my electorate office with local forgotten Australians—I hope they are now called ‘remembered Australians’ after Monday. We have sat around the table and talked about the reports and what should happen. Obviously, we have talked about things like reparation and compensation—all of the things that should happen. My personal belief is that reparation has to happen—that is, reparation in the broad sense. This covers a whole range of things that can be done to provide care and support for people
who have suffered abuse. That might cover compensation but it should cover things like decent access to health care. A lot of the forgotten Australians whom I know do have poor health status, and that can be physical, emotional and dental. Dental health is a big issue for many of these people because they never went to a dentist. They did not receive that sort of treatment. There are also other issues to do with the health of these people, such as not knowing where they come from—their genetic history—and things like that.

At one of the meetings in my office, which was quite an enjoyable meeting, I asked people, ‘If you could get money, how much would you want?’ because what has happened to them is not something that can be quantified. The amount that people came up with was $500,000 to get a house and a car. That gives an idea of some of the prices for houses in my area—although one person said $300,000. Some people might say, ‘You’re dreaming’, but it is okay to dream because, if you do not dream, a lot does not happen. It was good to discuss that.

I was pleased to see that people who were forgotten Australians will be treated specially in aged care and that care leavers will recognise their special needs. Nicholas Kostyn, who comes from my area, said that that was one of the key recommendations that needed to be taken up because people who have been institutionalised will experience a whole lot of feelings, as you can imagine, if they have to go into another institution—and it does not matter at what age. So I was pleased to see that recommendation taken up.

The National Find and Connect Service is a very important initiative, and the ability for people to record their stories is also great. My local newspapers, the Northern Star and the Daily Examiner, have been actively covering this issue in a very comprehensive way. This morning, the local 2LM radio was talking about the forgotten Australians. Everybody is interested in them. The media want to cover this history; they want to talk about it; and they want to know the stories of the people involved. The key issue that has come out of this is that it should not happen again. I agree.

When we were talking about this, another thing I said was, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice’—again, dreaming—‘if a forgotten Australian could have a gold card that gave them access to the services that they needed?’ We often talk about counselling but they need a lot more than that. They could access those services individually as they needed them and not through a particular service provision or a model or something like that. One man I spoke to this morning was an older man who never thought that he needed counselling. He is just going to counselling now and he said how helpful it has been over the last few years. People need it at different times in their lives for different reasons. Barbara Lane asked me the other day, ‘You will not forget to mention the gold card when you speak?’ I said, ‘No. I will make sure I put it on the public record.’ I have done that now.

I also say thank you to Penny Sharpe, the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport in New South Wales. I put in a request to her office for rail tickets. I know that Minister Macklin’s office put in that request as well. They said yes immediately. So a lot of people were able to get here in that way, including some people from my area. Everybody who was asked said yes and helped out wherever they could.

I also got a beautiful card from the people who came down with me the other day. I said I would mention that. One of them, Barbara Lane, wrote a poem, and I am going to read that poem now, Mr Deputy Speaker, with your indulgence. She wrote at the top of the poem, ‘To
Janelle, many thanks for all you have done—Barbara.’ It is called ‘Remembering Osler House:

Screams echo down the hallway of my mind, as they did the cells and hallways of that house of endless horrors, through the years.

My body still remembers all the shame of what I witnessed,
And the corrosive, all-pervasive acid-urine smell of fears.

I was thirteen years.

The sobbing, wailing background noise that ate away the night;
The soul-shattering, too-sudden … cessation of the screams,
These joined the tortured memories I buried in the abyss,
To carve away my childhood, brutally, as they stole my dreams.
I was only thirteen.

The milling, naked bodies in the showers with no doors;
The excrement and sanitary pads, my first time, on the floors.
Betrayed by my own government, the state that had my care,
In an adult asylum for the criminally insane; I’d pulled out all my hair.
I was only a child.

Hollow-eyed people, shock-treatment blank, helpless,
And no longer knowing their names;
The intellectually disabled and terrified children
Still haunt in their drugged, bruised and bare-naked shame.
I was thirteen years old.

By Barbara Lane

I worked in that mental institution. I know what it was like. There were children in there who did not have a mental illness. There are children who were forgotten Australians. There were all sorts of people dumped into that place. It was like the house of horrors. If you have ever read *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, you would recognise it. Even without knowing anything about it, when I read the first line I recognised it. I worked there when I was quite young. I was nearly 17 when I went to work there. I could not abide it. It was cruel. It was inhumane. That poem evokes memories for me.

Some of those children, who are now adults, came to me some years ago to see if I was prepared to give some evidence in cases that they wanted to run against the government. I said, ‘I will, but I am not sure how helpful I can be as a witness for particular people for particular incidents that happened.’ Fancy ending up somewhere for the mentally ill. The way the mentally ill who were there were treated is a whole other chapter.

I would like to finish by just saying how wonderful the day was. It was long overdue. Isn’t it good when you do something that is the right thing? One of my forgotten Australians said to me, ‘It was really nice to hear the good words from Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull on the day.’ (Time expired)

Dr STONE (Murray) (11.59 am)—I too rise to speak on the motion on the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. On Monday some of the nation
stopped to listen and acknowledge the terrible damage done to wards of the state and child migrants who were raised in institutions run by churches and charities, at so-called homes, farms and other places. The only crime of the children who were sent was that their parents were poor, their mothers unmarried or they were orphaned. Over much of the 20th century more than half a million children suffered terribly, many damaged permanently, as the state, federal and local governments looked the other way.

Organisations and churches were paid to exercise a duty of care, to nurture, nourish and educate these wards of the state. Preparing them for a happy and productive life as adults in Australia was their charge. Clearly these agencies failed to exercise humanity, kindness or care for the most precious and vulnerable of the nation’s children, and they stand condemned for that. Too often, children were physically and sexually abused, poorly nourished and not educated. They were forced to work for the agencies, who profited hugely from the whole business. The boards, the elders, the trustees, the priests, the nuns and the neighbours in places like Hay, Ballarat and Box Hill simply looked away.

The institutionalised children with living parents or siblings were often lied to about the existence of their families or cruelly denied access to brothers and sisters also made wards of the state. Surviving parents were also often lied to about the fate of their children or even their whereabouts. This is a most shameful part of our history and a part of our history which we must acknowledge and understand. It is also a shameful part of the history of Britain and other countries who also agreed to send or take migrant children in an extraordinary effort to breed their country white.

This era echoes the abuse of Indigenous children in Australia referred to as the ‘stolen generations’. For the non-Indigenous children, their experience was no less damaging in the life-time consequences. Many of those children talk, as adults, of the denial of their country and their identity, of having no experience of love or intimacy, of finding it impossible to form long-term, trusting, meaningful relationships, and of suffering long-term debilitating health problems associated with their early neglect and abuse, the hard physical work at too young an age and the poor nutrition, hygiene and shelter. The wonder is that so many children did survive to become proud, competent adults able to form families and independence in a country that for too long failed to believe their childhood neglect and suffering.

Often it is through coming to know the stories of individuals that the true cruelty of the experience and exploitation of these children becomes more deeply understood. That has certainly been my experience. I have been privileged to come to know Daryl Sloan, a constituent of mine in the Murray electorate. His life is an extraordinary example of human endurance and triumph through adversity. Not only is he a survivor of these institutions in the true sense of the word, but he and his wife now foster and love at-risk children who in the past would have been subjected to neglect and abuse in institutions like the one he was placed in.

At the age of 25 months, on 12 November 1963, Daryl and his two brothers aged four and six were charged in a court with having ‘no settled place of abode and no visible means of support’. The little boys’ punishment for this crime was immediate commitment to institutions as wards of the state. Daryl was the youngest of 13 children—some his father’s children, some his mother’s. His mother had endured and then ended an abusive marriage, but because her husband was a returned serviceman she was required to leave the war veteran provided family home, making her and her children homeless. Daryl’s mother was able to accommo-
date some of her children, her older children, with grandparents. She worked, but without any extra welfare support she had to give up some of her family into so-called care so she and they could survive.

Toddler Daryl was moved between Allambie, Turana and Ballarat children’s homes. The three brothers were separated according to their age in the three sections of Ballarat Children’s Home, so they were denied any access to family, or support for one another. When their mother tried to see them, she had a near impossible task. She had to travel by train from Shepparton to Melbourne, then back down to Ballarat, and try to see the three boys in three different places all in half an hour or so. You can only imagine the distress of that mother trying to stay in contact with her boys.

Daryl recalls the big plates of stale sandwiches regularly fed to the boys, apparently leftovers from a charitable nearby pub and taken carefully to Ballarat Children’s Home. He soon learned to reach for a sandwich from the middle of the plate because it was not so dry and curled, and there was more cigarette ash and beer spills on sandwiches at the edges of the plates. They had no pillows on their beds and the poorest of clothing. On reflection now Daryl can see that the people rushing frantically between cots trying to silence the babies were mere girls themselves, older wards of the state, with the far too heavy responsibility of looking after the rows of babies and toddlers. Daryl remembers wondering why so many cried, because he thought, ‘What is the use of crying.’ Daryl knows of others, little boys in the dormitories, who waited in fear each night, rolled tightly into a foetal position, dreading that the footsteps would stop at their bed, because it would be their turn again to endure violation at the hands of the paedophiles in charge of those young lives.

I agree with Daryl and so many others that the perpetrators of these and other crimes should now be identified wherever possible and prosecuted. No less than a royal commission in Victoria may be needed to ensure that these vile men and women, so far protected by the institutions that hired them, are flushed out and their deeds made public. Their victims deserve nothing less than to see them successfully prosecuted, along with others who so comprehensively failed in their duty of care to the most vulnerable and defenceless.

Daryl’s mother eventually formed a new relationship and the children in care were released back to her. But a life of great instability continued for Daryl. In all, he attended 17 schools and he left home as soon as he possibly could, at 15. You would expect Daryl’s life to then conform to a pattern that often follows poor education, poverty and a disjointed and dysfunctional family. And for a while it did. By his late 20s, however, Daryl had taken control of his life and was determined to make his mark in a fairer, kinder Australia. Daryl has now fostered in his own home with his family and their own children a succession of wards of the state—children like him who had been dealt an unlucky hand in life. He is now offering these children the continuity of care and love that he missed out on.

But Daryl, a highly intelligent, caring man, is not content to simply observe that the system of care for neglected or at-risk children today remains a serious and ongoing problem. With others, he is acutely aware that the system of foster care and carers is being driven into the ground, in particular in Victoria. The statistics speak for themselves. There were 5,500 foster carers in Victoria in 2002. By 2007, five years later, there were fewer than 1,000. The supply is in free fall and the Victorian government needs to ask why. The answers are self-evident. They do not take very long to discover.
There is a serious lack of support for foster carers, who, classified as volunteers, are expected to provide the additional, intensive support for their fostered children with very little financial or other assistance. Clearly, if you have several children of your own and are fostering others, often with very high needs, the ideal is for one of the parents to be able to offer that parenting full-time. In fact, however, in order to make ends meet, both parents usually need to work outside the home to pay the mortgage. How many good, loving, potential foster carers simply cannot afford to offer their services? Alternatively, how many of the 4,500 foster carers who used to help raise some of the country’s most troubled and needy children have simply been forced to cease fostering because they cannot afford to continue to do it—because they cannot make ends meet?

This is a disgraceful and shameful situation in our country, when we know that the alternative—institutional care in places sometimes called ‘cottages’—will continue to be less than ideal for a young child needing a nuclear family, some continuity of care and a lifetime of relationships with caring significant others. This is a hopeless situation now given that institutions are paid very substantial recompense to offer group care for wards, and I have to worry that this is potentially creating a new generation of forgotten children. Children who leave institutional care with no ongoing relationship with a caring, parent-like figure and no sense of family have diminished feelings of self-worth and a shattered identity. We see the consequences of such institutional care every day in an electorate like Murray, which has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the country. It is not surprising when we look at the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, SAAP, that over 40 per cent of those seeking help through that program have previously been institutionalised or brought up in so-called ‘care’.

Along with Daryl and many others who now seek to give every child a chance in this country, I call on the Victorian and federal governments to look very hard at the next generation of forgotten children. They are already with us. We know of the damage and distress that a life of neglect and lack of love leads to, particularly in early childhood. It is absolutely incumbent on all of us who stood in the House or in the Great Hall on Monday and who wholeheartedly embraced the motion of apology that we do not now rest and say the job is done. The job is just beginning for those who are recently enlightened.

I have Daryl Sloan to thank for helping me to understand more particularly what a cruel blow life can deliver to an innocent young child but how you can triumph despite that blow and how you can lead a better life through your work for so many others, but foster carers like Darryl need a lot of understanding, better attention and support.

I also believe that we should not rest in trying to bring to justice those who perpetrated the cruelties and the criminal acts in the deliberate neglect of innocent young wards. Many of them are still well and truly with us in the community, some continue to hold positions of responsibility. I believe as a nation we also need to seek out and prosecute those who are found guilty of very serious charges. We cannot do any less for the victims.

I certainly will continue to be concerned, particularly for those in my electorate. We did have a Presbyterian boys home based in Dhurringile, which is now a prison. At the time numbers of boys from overseas, migrant children, were sent to that place. I am not aware personally at this point whether any of those children suffered a less than proper experience there, but I intend to find out.
Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (12.12 pm)—This morning I had the opportunity to speak on the Crimes Amendment (Working With Children—Criminal History) Bill 2009. I preface my contribution to the debate on this motion by saying one of the things that I think unites most people generally, certainly everyone I know this place, is the fact that we put children in the forefront of our thinking. I am very fortunate to have three fine kids, and those who have ever heard me talk will know how proud I am of my four grandchildren. I cannot for the life of me think that anyone could not act to put kids in the forefront of their thinking. Therefore, it behoves governments that we do everything in our power to protect children. I take up the point just made by the member for Murray: these are things that should be at the forefront of government because children are our future.

I would like to take the opportunity today to reiterate the words of the Prime Minister and other members of this parliament from all sides of politics who have acknowledged the appalling abuse and cruelty towards those of the forgotten Australians and former child migrants who suffered whilst brought up as state wards in institutions—and who were brought up unloved. The apology to the forgotten Australians, like the apology made to the Indigenous Australians, is an apology that is very important. It is not about furthering a political agenda but rather doing what is right and what is decent.

We all know that this apology to the forgotten Australians and child migrants is a historic moment in their lives and, more importantly, is the first step to moving forward. It is the opportunity to formally recognise past injustices and to recognise that what happened was not their fault but the failure of the system. I know that this apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants will bring special meaning to people involved and their families. Hopefully, it will provide a measure of closure for them.

I pay particular tribute to one person, John Hennessey, who lives in Ingleburn—not far from my electorate office. John was born in Bristol in the UK. His mother was an unmarried 16-year-old who was encouraged to give her baby up at birth. At some stage, John, after having been in an orphanage run by a particular religious order, was shipped off to Australia along with about another 10,000 boys and girls. Clearly, British orphanages were overflowing and John, as I say, was transported to Australia. He went to Western Australia and spent his time, I think, at a BoysTown. John is 73 and is a very iconic figure in my electorate. He has been around for some considerable time. He has undertaken various roles in our community, including that of deputy mayor. But he is a 73-year-old and he speaks with an unmistakable stutter. He told me that he started stuttering at age 12. Most stutterers are kids. We went through this not that long ago when my three-year-old granddaughter started stuttering. What did we do? We went and took advice. We went and saw paediatricians. We did everything we could to address it. As I understand the advice, stuttering is normally acquired at preschool age and, provided it is approached carefully and consistently, can be ameliorated. Fortunately, that is the experience that we found with my three-year-old granddaughter.

John told me that he started stuttering at age 12. Ordinarily, I would have thought that was a bit unusual, but his life was unusual. I understand that when he was 12 John was stripped naked in front of 50 other boys and thrashed within an inch of his life at this orphanage near Perth for stealing grapes from a nearby vineyard. His point to me was that as a result of this incident he started stuttering. But the routine beatings were only one terrifying aspect of John’s life in this grim institution. He recounted to me that he faced perpetual hunger and
heavy labour. But, more horrifically, and with a fair degree of certainty from his perspective, in the night whilst he was in his dormitory he would be violated sexually.

Despite this young kid being uprooted from his country of origin and suffering these mental and physical scars, John went on to represent his community with distinction. In the 1980s, over his period of time on the council, he was elected Deputy Mayor of the Campbelltown City Council and has made an invaluable contribution to our local area. Given the horrific nature of John’s life, one could be excused for thinking, ‘How could that come about?’ After reading and listening to some of the heartbreaking stories of the forgotten Australians and former child migrants like John, one can only start to imagine how much they have suffered and continue to suffer.

John says to me: ‘That pain is something that you carry on. It was bad enough that we went through all that as a child—to be cut off from any relatives, to go through not knowing anything about your parent or parents and to be told that your mother died.’ He said that is something he struggles with. In fact, when I was talking to him just recently as he was preparing to come down to Canberra to personally witness the apology, John revealed to me that it would have been great for his mother to see this day. His mother died without him ever seeing her or being able to visit her. He thought this apology should also have been delivered to her and many other young mothers in a similar predicament who gave up their children to an orphanage to try to secure a better life than they could have provided for the child. John has been invited to travel to England next year to hear the apology as it is delivered by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, because this is not something that just involves Australians. This involves the policies of other countries—Malta and Great Britain—in terms of how these young people were treated.

However long it has taken for this apology, we know we cannot give back what was lost to people like John, the 500,000 other forgotten Australians and the 7,000 former child migrants. It is not the words of the apology that are important but the genuine feeling of sorrow, remorse and regret for the actions taken by past administrations and also the lasting hurt that the forgotten Australians and former child migrants have had to endure ever since. These are the people in our society that have been stripped of their childhood and of all those things that you, I and every other member here take for granted in respect of our kids and our grandkids. This is something that these people could never personally experience themselves. They were deprived of that experience. I know we cannot take away the pain, but this apology is aimed at addressing our past wrongs.

Finally I would like to pay tribute to the tireless work of the various groups representing the forgotten Australians and the many years that it has taken to bring this to reality. Through their persistence, I think they have done the community a great service by making sure that the facts of these issues are at the forefront of our minds. To the hundreds of people who gathered in the Great Hall to join with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, it is a very significant turning point in our national history, not simply to say sorry but to commit ourselves to take action for the future.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (12.23 pm)—I am pleased to speak on the occasion of this parliament’s national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. The apology is long deserved, and the sadness is that it has ever been necessary. We as a nation must acknowledge
the trauma and abuse that this generation of people suffered, and we must work with them to improve their lives and allow them to reconcile with their past.

It is reported that more than 500,000 Australians have experienced life in an orphanage, home or other form of out-of-home care during the last century in Australia. Many of these were child migrants who were transported from Britain to these shores, bringing with them the hopes of their families for a better life. Many of us have met someone who lived in an orphanage or a ‘naughty’ girls or boys home, as they were known when I was growing up. In Albury, St Johns at Thurgoona was for many years a Catholic orphanage, as was St Anne’s Home of Compassion girls home in Broken Hill.

I am not critical of St Johns or St Annes as I do know that they offered a safe haven from difficult and traumatic family situations for many who lived there. However, I also know that life was tough for the girls who lived there. The nuns were hard taskmasters. They were strict disciplinarians and they could not understand behaviour that was not mainstream nor offer comfort or affection in times of sadness. I am sure for those nuns these girls were from almost alien backgrounds and they were ill-equipped to deal with the emotional trauma that resulted from being separated from families and homes.

One of the most dreadful facilities in all of Australia was the Hay Institution for Girls. It is also in the Farrer electorate. It opened in 1961 and operated as a secondary punishment centre for girls from Parramatta who were considered incorrigible or failed to meet minimum standards. Many had undiagnosed mental health conditions. Most came from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Many had been state wards from a very young age. Some were Indigenous stolen generation children and, most importantly, none had committed any criminal offences. They were simply the lost and forgotten children of Australia’s welfare system.

Girls were transferred at night by train to Narrandera and then to Hay in the back of a lock-up van. On their arrival they were issued with a set of institutional clothes, given routine instructions and had their hair cut short to a depersonalised institutional bob. Their introduction to hard labour in Hay was a 10-day stint locked in a cell where they were forced to scrub paint from the walls back to the brick surface. This was followed with repainting the surface for the next unfortunate arrival. Cells were furnished with a single iron-frame bed, a thin mattress, a blanket, sheets, a pillow, the Bible and a night can. The girls were only allowed 10 minutes twice a day to talk between themselves, eyes to the floor at all times. They were only allowed to talk to a staff member by raising their arm and awaiting a response and at all times they had to be at least six feet apart from each other—no visitors, no mail in or out, no privacy, every movement monitored, controlled, every response signalled by procedure or order. At night they were issued only four sheets of toilet paper and ordered to sleep on their sides, facing the door and checked every 20 minutes.

The institution closed down on 30 June 1974, and in 2008 the Outback Theatre for Young People produced a play titled Eyes to the Floor by Alana Valentine based on the experience of the girls from Hay. Over the years there have been many reports into institutional care for children, some in fact date back to the 1800s when it was determined that institutional care was not the best outcome for children. One report in 1945 into a Sydney industrial school found many shortcomings which they said at the time could be matched at institutions throughout the Commonwealth, and yet we still continued to allow these facilities to operate.
A British report in 1956 called the Ross report strongly criticised Australia’s children’s institutions for their lack of trained staff, isolation from the community and the poor educational and employment opportunities provided, and yet we still allowed them to continue to provide care. In 1961 the Schwarten inquiry into the Queensland correctional centre for boys, Westbrook, drew attention to the many issues, including the poor standard of food, inadequate hygiene and excessive drill. The inquiry focused particularly on the institution’s punishment regime, noting that: the strap was used excessively and too often; punishment for disciplinary breaches was unduly harsh and excessive; and boys were physically assaulted by certain members of staff in a vicious and brutal way, a story echoed across Australian institutions. Yet we still allowed it to happen to these most vulnerable of humans—children.

I could continue on with the many other reports but I will focus on the one that I have had some involvement in and which I believe has been instrumental in the apology this week. That is the report entitled *Forgotten Australians* released in August 2004 by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee. At the time of the Senate inquiry into Australians who experienced institutional, out-of-home care as children I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs and so I met personally many of those people who made submissions to the report. I feel this week as I felt then the extraordinary feelings of their suffering and helplessness and have just some very, very small idea of how they must have felt on the day of the apology this week.

But it is no less heartbreaking five years later to think that we as a supposedly civilised country turned our backs on children in this way. It is unbelievable. While it does seem totally at odds with our culture and our beliefs, it still happened. The Senate committee was due to report in December 2003 actually, but due to the sheer volume of evidence that required processing and the complex issues that the inquiry unveiled the reporting date was extended to August 2004. The committee received 614 submissions from care leavers who had been in institutions or foster homes across all states in Australia from the 1920s to the 1990s.

The Senate committee said at the time that without doubt this inquiry has generated the largest volume of highly personal, emotive and significant evidence of any Senate inquiry. The committee members and the staff of the secretariat and the department were overwhelmed at the events described in the evidence. It was as unthinkable to them, and in fact to me, that human beings could treat one another, let alone such young and helpless people, in such a psychologically and physically abusive manner. The submissions that I read at the time were almost surreal in their intensity. I would like to quote from one care leaver whose submission was included in part in the introduction of the inquiry report:

In some ways I feel like wasted potential, I feel that because I was full of potential as a child and if I’d had a different childhood I could have done anything and been anyone I wanted but instead I was lumbered with a childhood where I had no rights and the government “carers” did whatever they felt like doing to me, so instead of being anything I wanted I’ve had to deal and cope with the horror of my childhood. This is something that I will keep doing for the rest of my life. I also ask, “what if what happened to me, happened to one of your children”? That’s how you need to view me, as a child as valued as your own because I am someone’s daughter, my parents just aren’t here.

I believe that this quote eloquently and clearly outlines to us as a government that we must take some responsibility for this dark period in our history, and that this apology will go a long way towards us as a nation accepting what happened.

**MAIN COMMITTEE**
I still keep in contact with some of the care leavers, and it saddens me that many still do not believe that they have the right to live a better life—that they are not worthy of good things—and that they face great difficulties in improving their situation. Over the past few years I came to know Sherry, who lives in my electorate. She has been married a couple of times, she has children with whom she often had a difficult relationship and her youngest daughter is a talented musician. The first time Sherry told me her story, in her quiet, self-effacing way, it moved me immensely. She had been belted in her home by the heavy bunch of keys that the carers carried around on their belts, and she told me of girls being branded with hot irons. She told me of her escape from the institution and of her awful life on the streets. When your life begins with such hardship it is almost impossible to get it back on the rails, and Sherry’s life has never been easy. But she has great spirit. She studied and she gained a certificate in aged care. She is a fabulous mother to her own daughter and she has reconnected with her own mother, difficult though that surely must have been.

I could recite many stories which are included in the submissions to the Senate inquiry, but I want to mention one particular person who deserves to be acknowledged. She has been acknowledged by many members of the parliament. My first contact with CLAN, or the Care Leavers Network, was through Leonie Sheedy. She was a care leaver herself but also a volunteer who had inadvertently started a helpline for other care leavers. She was passionate, loving and absolutely exhausted, because she had heard thousands of stories from care leavers and she just did not know how much longer she could continue to physically and emotionally help them. But still she went on. What was amazing to me was that she had very little assistance or financial support. She was obviously trying hard to be all things to all people, and the emotional impact on her was immense. She had so few resources to help her with this huge task. For me to see her big smile during the apology on Monday was just fantastic.

The circumstances of these forgotten children are unique. Many do not know who their parents were, or even their correct name or date of birth. They have been subjected to abuse and ignorance, and they do not believe they deserve love or assistance, so they will always struggle with acceptance and trust. The apology and the many reports have gone some way to proving to care leavers that they are deserving of assistance, but we must work with them and their children and their partners to ensure that they get all of the help, love and support that they deserve. This week we have taken the first step of what will be a long journey, but the years ahead will be hard because, of course, this apology is no miracle cure. We must build more specific support systems for this group of people into the future, and I very much support the measures that the Prime Minister outlined as a good start.

I would like to provide a short but insightful quote from Solzhenitsyn, which came to him during his time in the Gulag:

It was only when I lay there on the rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart … If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

When we look at those who stood by and saw the evil deeds committed in the name of churches, charities and state governments, it is too easy to say that these were evil deeds
committed by evil people in another time. To think that would be wrong and would lull us into a false sense of security. The reality is that children are still victims, are still betrayed and still need all of us to exercise continual vigilance on their behalf. We cannot fix it for the forgotten Australians but we can pledge to do all we can to make sure that this shameful period of our history is not revisited for any child in anyone’s care. On behalf of all the people of Farrer who I represent here in the federal parliament, may I offer my sincere and heartfelt apologies to the forgotten Australians for the wrongs done, the hurts inflicted and the childhoods lost.

Mr RAGUSE (Forde) (12.36 pm)—Today I rise to applaud and congratulate the Prime Minister on his apology this week and also to applaud Minister Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, for the hard work and effort she put into bringing this issue and this event to a conclusion. But when I say a conclusion, it is really only the beginning. It is only the beginning of what we need to do in the process of healing. It is a significant event, but in order to complete the process of healing we really do have to understand the whole complexity of what occurred. It is about having no more secrets. For too long, lots of these things have been buried in people’s memories and those emotions have been covered up. I would like to acknowledge today those who were affected and who have fought for this recognition. It really goes to the opening up of more issues and to lifting the lid on some of the secrets. It is about identifying areas that still need resolution.

I have spoken before in this chamber about the fact that I am an adoptee. While I, and many adoptees more generally, have had a very good life, there are issues that relate to adoptees as much as they do to the forgotten Australians and child migrants. A lot of child migrants and some of the forgotten Australians were also caught up in the adoption process. Too many stories exist in relation to the adoption process and the forgotten Australians, but all are related to similar issues of institutional care, the problems that existed and the lack of identification of some of those problems. Many of the young women who arrived here as child migrants later became single mothers and further institutional care put them into a situation of some grief and loss.

It is about relinquishment and the profound loss experienced, whether it was families who lost children as migrants coming to this country never to be reunited, or the loss in this country of children who had brothers and sisters. Today I want to put on the record my connection with those who are affected by adoption. I have spoken many times in this House about the positive aspects of adoption. For those people who have been caught up in it, and certainly for those mothers who have had to relinquish their children, I want to put on the record what we need to do for other forgotten Australians and migrant children and for those affected by adoption as part of the healing process.

To provide a brief background—and I have spoken about this before—my mother was 17 years old when I was born. She was the oldest of 12 children and the family were quite destitute. My mother was told that she could have the child and would be able to take it home. That was not to happen but little did she know that until after the fact. Whilst I was being born, a pillow was placed to her head to stop her seeing or understanding anything that was going on. She remembers my cries as I was being taken down the hallway to the nursery. She was then put into a ward with mothers who had had stillbirths, those who had lost children...
through miscarriages and some who had suffered infant deaths. At that point she only saw me very briefly when a kindly nurse said to her: ‘Come and have a look. Here is the baby.’ However, she was then told to go away and forget that she ever saw it. Her breasts were then bound so that she would not produce milk and she was told to go home and start a new life; that it was just a mistake. That is the sort of profound loss that many of the forgotten Australians and migrants have also felt.

What I wanted to put on the record today is a statement, a ‘Declaration of Profound Loss’ that 21 organisations, including those involved in the apology this week, have issued. This Declaration of Profound Loss came before the apology, so the apology was the start of that reparation, getting things very much on the record and out of the closet so there are no more secrets. The Declaration of Profound Loss by these 21 organisations reads:

We the undersigned
MOURN the loss of our children
TAKEN FOR ADOPTION
MOURN the loss of our families of origin
DENIED US BY ADOPTION
MOURN the loss of our brothers and sisters
CAUSED BY ADOPTION
MOURN the loss of grandparents
DENIED US BY ADOPTION
MOURN the loss of our rightful position in life
DECREED BY ADOPTION

As I said, this is a statement signed by 21 organisations. Again, the apology this week goes some way to starting to resolve the issues of that loss.

Can I now indulge the chamber by reading a letter that I have been asked to read by an organisation called ALAS, the Adoption Loss Adult Support group. Again, these emotions are very much the same as those being felt by people who were in institutional care and affected by institutional care. This letter was to me. It says:

Dear Brett,
We, the members of A.L.A.S. Qld, call on all members of parliament to apologise to the mothers of another stolen generation here in Australia.
The ongoing pain, suffering, psychological scars and heartache have been caused by the actions of over zealous consent takers, social workers, doctors, nurses and medical staff. Through threats, bullying and coercion, our babies were stolen for the purpose of adoption.
They denied us our legal rights to raise our much loved and wanted babies, by never allowing us to see, hear or hold them. Such practices were inhumane, barbaric and cruel.
Our babies lost their biological right to be raised by their mothers, leaving them with unresolved anger and grief at the loss of their identity and natural family.

A grave miscarriage of justice was done to us.
Most of us were under the legal age of 21 years and did not have legal presentation or a parent present. It was impossible to reject the intense pressure placed upon us to sign the consent form.
At the time of consent, most mothers were still under the influence of strong medications. Signatures obtained under these circumstances for a legal document, were invalid.

Some babies were placed in locked nurseries, had their birth weight and time of birth changed so they could not be found. This was the usual procedure until a signature was obtained.

We make this approach for an apology on behalf of the A.L.A.S members and all women who were subjected to the former coercive adoption practices.

Please find attached a copy of Royal Brisbane Women’s Hospital apology.

The hospital sent an apology, and it reads:

Dear Friends,

Thank you for meeting with senior members of Women’s and Newborn Services at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital … and sharing your stories with us about the care you received at the Royal Women’s Hospital some time ago. It was very moving and indeed saddening to hear how your experiences have adversely affected your lives, and many other lives that are near and dear to you.

From our frank discussions, we understand that each of you was denied the right to experience the natural relationship between mother and child to care for and to raise your children yourselves, but because of hospital practices were not permitted to do so.

In summary you have described to us how your much wanted babies were taken from you by the practices of the hospital operating at the time and that you feel you were coerced by hospital staff to sign over your babies for adoption.

In this regard we acknowledge the hurt and suffering you have described and sincerely apologise for any ill treatment experienced by you as single women during your pregnancy and confinement at the Royal Women’s Hospital.

That is signed by Professor Ian Jones.

Further to that, the Anglican Church was also approached, among other organisations. I am only reading a sample of these letters, but I think it is very fitting that these organisations have seen fit to apologise. This letter is to one of the members of the ALAS organisation:

Dear Mrs Hamilton

Thank you for your letter … regarding your experiences in St Mary’s Home in Toowong …

I was most concerned when I read of your distressing experiences in St Mary’s in 1966 and the sad separation from your baby as he was taken for adoption. As you have so poignantly written, the effects of that separation are still with you and your son even after so many years. These effects may perhaps be only slightly lessened by your knowledge that he is alive and safe.

It is concerning now to be made aware of actions taken in the past which—while often taken with the best of current knowledge at the time—have now caused so much distress and hurt to those persons directly involved.

I sincerely apologise to you for the hurt and distress caused to you by past actions of the Church and those persons employed by the Church at St Mary’s. On behalf of the Church, I would like to offer you pastoral support and counselling. If you consider this may be helpful, please contact … and we—

will then make the necessary arrangements with you.

That is signed by the Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall, Archbishop of Brisbane.
After the apology was given, I received a letter from a group called Origins Inc. They were accepting of and very happy with the apology because they know the issues that surround the adoption processes well. The letter said:

Origins Inc is a support organisation for people affected by adoption, removal and separation welcomes the apology to the Forgotten Australians.

As stated by the Federal Government on the announcement of the apology, many of these children were from unmarried mothers, and many were taken from these mothers by the forced adoption practices of various States and adoption agencies.

Many babies taken for adoption were placed into care either as the result of medical problems, or were returned to the care of religious and State institutions when the child became an unwanted responsibility, or the adoptive parents became parents of their own natural children.

These babies were denied the security of their own mother’s love, by a system and a society that treated the lone mother as a pariah, and her child as a “result” of an immoral act that needed legitimizing in order to become an accepted part of society.

This is another group of children that follow in the path of the Stolen Generations, Child migrants and Forgotten Australians that have all suffered at the hands of a cruel and unloving system.

We are yet to hear from the 150,000 mothers and their children forcibly taken for the adoption market from 1950-2000. Once this sordid chapter in Australia’s history is addressed and documented through a Senate inquiry then we may say that we finally live in a compassionate and equal society.

They are some of the feelings that still remain. While recognising the apology it does lift the lid on some of those other issues that may have to be resolved as time goes by. I applaud the PM and Jenny Macklin, the minister, for their work in resolving the issues of the forgotten Australians and migrant children. I think it is our role as members of parliament—now that the lid has been lifted, as someone said in this chamber earlier—to start the healing process by getting some of these people on board to tell their stories and be part of a resolution so that they can live with the understanding that their issues have been recognised.

It is about those people affected by institutional care. When I said that my adoption was one that was very good for me with loving parents and a wonderful upbringing, I solidly recognise that there are some who did not have those same experiences, including many of the relinquishing mothers that I have had involvement with over the last 20-odd years. They are applauding the fact that the government has recognised issues of grief and loss and that migrant children, forgotten Australians or others in our society who are affected by institutional care should be recognised and given similar support and help, and I know that will come.

This is a very, very intense, emotional issue for many people. I do not want to upset the balance in understanding adoption, because it was well intentioned. It was a system run mostly by state agencies, and the federal government were not necessarily directly involved. Some of the statements made in the apology by the Prime Minister the other day showed that some well-meaning and caring organisations actually lacked the ability to care for individuals, which is very clear from the forgotten Australians and migrant children who suffered. Some of them doubly suffered through what occurred to them and their children through either foster care or the adoption process. It was well intentioned but it was certainly an uncaring system at the time.

It is through our recognition in bringing these issues to the table and to the chambers of parliament that everyone will know we have lifted the lid on the issue and now have the op-
portunity for no more secrets. One of the issues around adoption was that it was secretive. There are laws that prevented people having access. For the migrant children and forgotten Australians the problem is that there were no records, so lots of that contact was lost. In relation to adoption—and this was only just resolved in Queensland this year—people can finally get access to some of their birth information. I have spoken of my own story before in this chamber about getting information on my background and medical history. Only 20 years ago finding my natural family was very, very important to me. For a whole range of reasons people who have found themselves in that situation understand it.

That is a small part of the wider feelings the apology was directed at earlier this week. The apology was to those forgotten Australians and migrant children who suffered at the hands of institutions that were well intentioned, no doubt, but just could not provide the care, support and emotional treatment that many of us as young people certainly require, and not having proper care at a young age has an effects on us as adults.

This apology is about building a caring community—a community that does understand its past. It is so important that we understand where we have come from. The Prime Minister, in his speech, said that denying or not understanding the past can mean that we make the same mistakes in the future. In my 50 years of life we have become a sophisticated society. When I was a child, even the mention of adoption or of being the child of an unmarried mother was something to be ashamed of. My school friends would call me the ‘bastard’ and I still hold that as something that happened to me, and I accepted it and I understood it. But we have certainly progressed and matured as a country since that time.

For those reasons I again applaud the government for the apology and I certainly applaud all the members who have spoken in the House and in this chamber today about the need for this apology and about their understanding that it is a start. This is about moving forward and about rectifying the past. It also about understanding that, as a country, we have done the right thing and that we will continue to do the right thing for all those who have been affected by being a child migrant, a forgotten Australian or by adoption.

Mr Bruce Scott (Maranoa) (12.50 pm)—I rise to support the motion on the national apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. I acknowledge the speakers who have talked so openly about, and with so much understanding of, the hurt that they, their constituents and so many thousands Australians experienced as children. I acknowledge the member for Forde and admire the way in which he has put on record, in the Hansard, his own experience. I am sure that it is very hard to talk about, but I sometimes think that talking about these experiences is part of the healing process. Although the member for Forde said that he was adopted out to wonderful and loving parents, I found listening to his story very hard and heart-rending.

I commend the speeches that were made in the Great Hall on the national apology and of course all of the speeches that have been made on it since. The speeches of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition took place in what was a very emotionally charged Great Hall. Many people attended the apology in the Great Hall. Obviously not all those who have suffered abuse were able to be there. Only a very small cross-section of the people who have suffered abuse from government institutions, churches and charitable organisations were there.
I want to acknowledge the work of the senators who were involved in the reports that have led to this national apology. They deserve great credit too—not just those of us who are speaking on the apology now, such as the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. These senators went out and did the hard yards in gathering the information about this abuse and in bringing forward in reports that have ultimately led to a long-awaited acknowledgment of this very dark side—a very black side—of our nation’s history. None of us can be proud of it. It is important that we look back, and we have done that.

I also want to acknowledge former Senator Murray. He has been openly and widely acknowledged by many for his work in this area. After he left the parliament, he continued this work. He and those other senators who are no longer with us and who worked in this area must feel a great sense of satisfaction with the work that they did through the committees. If I can digress for a moment, I think this apology underpins the importance of much of the work that is done by the committees of the House and the Senate. I think too often the committees bring forward their reports and there is little response from governments of both sides of the House to them. This is one of those very positive results following the work of a committee.

I want to share with the chamber some of the comments about the apology that I have received from my constituents. I particularly want to talk about a man called ‘Ray’. For 45 years, Ray has tried to forget what happened to him and his family—his brothers and sisters. I was talking to him on the day of the apology, and he said that it is a start but more needs to be done. More work needs to be done on restitution, but the apology is certainly a start for him. I want to share with you part of his story—and it is only a very little part of it. Many years ago, programs were funded to take children away on a holiday to the beach. Ray, along with his brothers and sisters, went on one of them. They boarded a train at Cunnamulla and went to a camp down at the beach, where they saw the ocean for the first time. They had a holiday by the sea.

When they hopped on that train to go back home, they were looking forward to seeing their parents after having that wonderful time, as kids would from the bush—and I know how important it is for them to be in the salt air and sand and play in some of these holiday camps. When their train arrived at the railway station in Cunnamulla they were met not by their parents but by the police. The police put those children straight back on that train and sent them away to orphanages. Brothers and sisters were put into orphanages not far from Brisbane. I think one was near Nudgee and another one was at Riverview.

In talking to Ray about his experiences there, he said that, some days, he could see his separated brothers and sisters, but within the orphanage they were not allowed to talk to their brothers and sisters. If he did, as we have heard in a number of speeches, he was taken aside and given a flogging; these were his words. His sister would have received the same sort of treatment and they were barred from seeing their brother or their sister, albeit in an orphanage. It eventually got too much for Ray and he ran away. He spent many, many years running away and trying to escape the horror of what he had experienced. He did say to me that he was not sexually abused, but he was physically and mentally abused. He ended up on a large pastoral property in Western Australia as an unknown person, and he has a great deal of time for the family that gave him an opportunity and a job. He still has contact with the family that under-
stood the plight he was in but never revealed him to the authorities for fear that he would be taken back and put into an institution once again.

For any parent, just to think about your own children and how you have loved them and nurtured them through those very formative years, it is hard to comprehend how those children lacked that nurturing. There are the maternal instincts of a mother that are lost because of what happened to so many children being taken away and put in orphanages. Maybe, as was considered at the time, it was for their welfare but, as we all know now, the physical, mental and sexual abuse that so many of them suffered is just incomprehensible in a modern Australia.

Another person that spoke with me was Robyn from Stanthorpe and I want to share with the chamber Robyn’s story. Back in 1959 when she was 15 years of age, her mother had been divorced for some 10 years from her husband, and she was not able to help her—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! As a division has been called in the House and it is almost time to adjourn proceedings, the honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

Main Committee adjourned at 12.58 pm