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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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**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

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<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
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<td>Hon. Duncan Kerr SC, MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Byrne MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secretary for Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services</td>
<td>Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
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SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP

Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. Julie Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals
The Hon. Warren Truss MP

Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Senator the Hon. Nick Minchin

Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz

Shadow Treasurer
The Hon. Joe Hockey MP

Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design
The Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP

Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation
Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan

Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion

Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
The Hon. Tony Abbott MP

Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water
The Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
The Hon. Peter Dutton MP

Shadow Minister for Defence
Senator the Hon. David Johnston

Shadow Attorney-General
Senator the Hon. George Brandis SC

Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
The Hon. John Cobb MP

Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Mr Michael Keenan MP

Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts
Mr Steven Ciobo MP

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

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

Shadow Assistant Treasurer
The Hon. Tony Smith MP

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

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

Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government
Mr Scott Morrison 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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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9.00 am and read prayers.

TRANS-TASMAN PROCEEDINGS BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr McClelland.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.01 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

Australia’s links with our New Zealand neighbours are strong and diverse.

The relationship extends across government, business, community and sport, and is a rock-solid alliance.

In fact, I am very happy to welcome the New Zealand Minister for Justice, the Hon. Simon Power, who is with us here in the chamber today. He is a good bloke—I think that expression is used in New Zealand as well—a competent minister and tremendously energetic in developing relations between our two countries.

The Australia New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement cemented these links, and the trans-Tasman economic and trade relationship has prospered since its inception in 1983.

That agreement, and a range of others under it, has led to a steady increase in the movement of people, assets and the provision of services across the Tasman.

It is inevitable that such a close relationship will give rise to the greater possibility of legal disputes with a trans-Tasman element. But, despite our close relationship, there are currently only limited civil legal cooperation arrangements in place between Australia and New Zealand.

In many ways our two legal systems treat trans-Tasman disputes in the same way as they would treat a dispute involving any other foreign country.

This is clearly something that must change. We need structures that reflect our close relationship, our shared common law heritage and our strikingly similar legal systems.

With the introduction of the Trans-Tasman Proceedings Bill 2009, this is now set to change.

The bill will operate alongside its companion New Zealand legislation—and they have got the jump on us in this respect. Their legislation was introduced into the New Zealand Parliament yesterday.

Together, both bills will significantly enhance current arrangements and improve access to justice by establishing a cooperative scheme to make trans-Tasman litigation simpler, cheaper and more efficient.

Trans-Tasman Agreement

Most significantly, the bill implements into Australian law the Agreement Between the Governments of Australia and New Zealand on Trans-Tasman Court Proceedings and Regulatory Enforcement, which I had the pleasure of signing in Christchurch on 24 July 2008. Clearly a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to implement the provisions of that agreement.

Essentially the agreement draws on the commonalities between the legal values and institutions in Australia and New Zealand, and enshrines a range of innovative reforms which will benefit litigants in both countries.

Reforms in the Bill

The bill sets up a ‘trans-Tasman regime’ for the conduct of court proceedings between
Australia and New Zealand. The regime is modelled on the cooperative scheme established by the Commonwealth Service and Execution of Process Act 1992, which regulates legal proceedings between Australian states and territories.

This bill includes a range of measures to improve the procedure for conducting trans-Tasman litigation.

For example, the bill allows a plaintiff to serve Australian civil initiating process on a defendant in New Zealand without first having to seek leave, or prove that a particular connection exists between the proceedings and the Australian court.

Importantly, the bill, along with its New Zealand equivalent, broadens the range of judgments able to be recognised and enforced, and simplifies the process for that occurring.

Currently only money judgments can be enforced between the two countries—but this can often leave a party without an effective remedy to which they are entitled. The regime addresses this problem by allowing non-money judgments, like injunctions, to be enforced. Eligible judgments will also be subject to a more streamlined process of registration.

The bill also allows the greater use of technology in trans-Tasman proceedings. In many cases, parties will be able to participate in proceedings in the other country without having to leave their home jurisdiction by using technologies such as video links and the like.

**Regulatory enforcement**

The bill also enhances the effectiveness of regulatory institutions in both countries.

It allows for certain civil pecuniary penalties and criminal fines in regulatory matters to be registered between the two countries—for example, penalties imposed for serious breaches of the Australian Trade Practices Act or the New Zealand Commerce Act.

These reforms are a recognition of the mutual interest our two countries have in the effective operation and integrity of trans-Tasman markets and the enforcement of judgments imposed for breaches of such regimes.

**Incorporation of existing legislative provisions**

Along with implementing the agreement, this legislation rolls in existing provisions dealing with trans-Tasman proceedings, to create a one-stop shop for laws governing the conduct of trans-Tasman disputes. This will make proceedings simpler for litigants.

The Evidence and Procedure (New Zealand) Act 1994 currently sets up a cooperative regime for the taking of evidence and service and enforcement of subpoenas between Australia and New Zealand. That act is moved into the bill with minor amendments and subsequently repealed.

The Federal Court Act 1976 currently has special rules for the conduct of proceedings regarding damage to competition in trans-Tasman markets. These rules have been moved into the bill, with minor amendments, and will continue to operate to facilitate effective resolution of market proceedings.

**Stakeholder support**

This project has benefited from consistent support from stakeholders in both countries, as well as from the two governments working cooperatively together.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the engagement of the states and territories in developing the framework for the regime and the collaborative way in which the agreement has been implemented in corresponding legislation in both countries. And of course, again, I recognise the tremendous support
and drive of the New Zealand government and the role that Minister Power has played.

Conclusion

The regime established by this bill, and its New Zealand equivalent, demonstrates the strong and shared respect for, and confidence in, each other’s justice systems and regulatory institutions.

The legislation underpins an unprecedented level of legal cooperation between our two countries. It is also consistent with the government’s Strategic Framework for Access to Justice.

The Trans-Tasman Proceedings Bill, and its New Zealand equivalent, stand as an example of what can be achieved when two countries commit to finding more efficient and cost-effective ways to resolve cross-border disputes. I have pleasure in commending the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

The SPEAKER (9.11 am) — Could I join with the Attorney-General in, once again, welcoming Minister Power. I am relieved that he has been able to witness the chamber in a very tranquil state because, if he got any order out of the chaos he witnessed during yesterday’s proceedings, he is a very good Minister of Justice. He is most welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

AUSTRALIAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Dr Emerson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.09 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

The Trans-Tasman Proceedings (Transitional and Consequential Provisions) Bill 2009 contains a range of transitional measures and consequential amendments to support a smooth transition to the new arrangements established by the Trans-Tasman Proceedings Bill 2009.

The bill makes clear how various aspects of the regime will apply to the conduct of trans-Tasman legal proceedings commenced before the Trans-Tasman Proceedings Bill comes into operation.

It also makes consequential amendments to existing legislation. The primary bill is designed to be a single point of reference for people on how to conduct trans-Tasman legal proceedings. This bill repeals the Evidence and Procedure (New Zealand) Act 1994 and the trans-Tasman market proceedings provisions of the Federal Court Act 1976. These provisions have been moved into the primary bill, with minor amendments.

This bill is necessary to ensure that the Trans-Tasman Proceedings Bill 2009 can operate as intended, and I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.
That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to establish the Australian Astronomical Observatory as an Australian owned and operated facility when the joint Australia-UK Anglo-Australian Observatory winds up on 1 July 2010.

Australia and the United Kingdom have been partners in the AAO for more than 35 years. Unfortunately, science budget cuts in the UK have led to the UK government’s decision to focus its astronomy resources on fewer facilities. In 2005 the Australian and UK governments agreed that on 1 July 2010 the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board would be disbanded and the AAO handed over to the Australian government.

The Australian Astronomical Observatory Bill is one of two bills being introduced today, to give effect to the 2005 agreement. The other is the Australian Astronomical Observatory (Transitional Provisions) Bill.

The UK withdrawal provides an opportunity for Australia to take over a world-class facility that is still producing leading-edge science. The observatory is an iconic facility with a strong record of scientific achievement and major discoveries. The four-metre diameter Anglo-Australian telescope provides over half of our national telescope capability in optical astronomy and was ranked by a recent independent international survey as the world’s most productive telescope in its class.

Innovative astronomical instruments, designed and built by the observatory, are installed not only on the Anglo-Australian telescope but also on other major telescopes around the world, including the European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope and Japan’s Subaru telescope in Hawaii. They are an important demonstration of Australia’s technological capabilities.

These are some of the reasons why the government announced, as part of the Super Science Initiative for space and astronomy in the 2009-10 budget, that the observatory will continue to operate under new governance arrangements, with additional funding of $20.9 million over four years.

This bill gives effect to these new governance arrangements, including establishing the facility, renamed the Australian Astronomical Observatory, as a business unit of the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.

The bill also establishes the position of the director of the Australian Astronomical Observatory. The intention is that the director will be a person with appropriate expertise both in astronomical science and in the leadership and management of a world-class science facility.

The bill formally confers astronomical functions on the secretary of the department but provides for these to be delegated to the director or to a suitable APS employee within the observatory.

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—
Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Dr EMERSON—The main functions will be to operate Australia’s national observatory—

Mrs Mirabella interjecting—
Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Can I just suggest to the member for Indi that there are other ways that she might wish to raise things, but she should not raise them across the table at this point in time. The minister has the call.

Dr EMERSON—Thank you. The main functions will be to operate Australia’s national observatory for optical astronomy, to
undertake, support and report on astronomical research and to develop and manufacture astronomical observing instruments. The observatory will also serve the optical astronomy community in other ways, including by supporting Australia’s participation in future world-leading astronomical facilities.

The director will be supported by the Australian Astronomical Observatory Advisory Committee, which will provide independent expert advice on how the astronomical functions are to be performed.

This bill, together with the new funding announced by the government in the 2009-10 budget, will help to ensure that the observatory continues to host and support world-class astronomy, to be an innovative source of new astronomical instruments and to provide the expertise Australia needs to participate in international scientific collaborations.

Further details of the bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

AUSTRALIAN ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY (TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Dr Emerson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Dr Emerson (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (9.17 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to provide for transitional arrangements relating to the proposed establishment of the Australian Astronomical Observatory within the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.

This is the companion to the Australian Astronomical Observatory Bill.

Together, these bills provide for disbanding the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board, which operates the Anglo-Australian Observatory, and for the observatory to be re-established within the department of innovation as the Australian Astronomical Observatory, to take effect from the transition date of 1 July 2010.

Schedule 1 of this bill repeals the Anglo-Australian Telescope Agreement Act 1970, which established the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board as a binational authority to operate the Anglo-Australian Observatory, funded jointly by the governments of Australia and the United Kingdom. One effect of this provision is to dissolve the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board.

Schedule 2 to the bill contains the transitional provisions for establishing the Australian Astronomical Observatory as a unit within the department of innovation. These include provisions for the transfer of assets, liabilities, legal arrangements and other matters from the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board to the Commonwealth.

The observatory’s employees are to be transferred into the department of innovation under the provisions of the Public Service Act 1999. The bill provides for the transfer of their terms and conditions of employment and the maintenance of their accrued entitlements.

Schedule 2 also provides for the preservation of existing powers and obligations of the Auditor-General to audit the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board’s financial records after the dissolution of the board. There are also provisions relating to the furnishing and tabling in the parliament of the
This bill will facilitate the smooth transfer to the department of the employees, assets and other matters of the board so that the observatory can continue its important work without interruption, while maintaining transparency, accountability and continuity of corporate and Commonwealth responsibilities.

Further details of the bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

TEXTILE, CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PROGRAM AMENDMENT (BUILDING INNOVATIVE CAPABILITY) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Dr Emerson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (9.20 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill amends the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Strategic Investment Program Act 1999 to provide legislative authority for the new Clothing and Household Textile (Building Innovative Capability) Scheme.

The scheme is part of the textile, clothing and footwear innovation package announced by the government as part of the 2009-10 budget. This package demonstrates our determination to secure the long-term viability of the TCF industries in Australia.

The Clothing and Household Textile (Building Innovative Capability) Scheme will replace the TCF Post-2005 Strategic Investment Program, otherwise known as SIP, Scheme for the 2010-11 to 2014-15 income years.

The legislative framework established by the bill is modelled on the framework underpinning the TCF Post-2005 (SIP) Scheme. This will ensure that the transition between the old scheme and the new one is as seamless as possible, minimising participants’ administrative and compliance costs.

The new scheme will provide grants to clothing and household textile designers and manufacturers in Australia who invest in innovation.

The Australian industry is making the transition from a tariff of 17.5 per cent on clothing and certain household textile products to a general manufacturing tariff of five per cent, which will apply from 2015.

In order to adjust successfully, the industry will have to become more competitive. It will have to focus on high-technology, high-value products.

This will only happen if manufacturers and designers increase their capacity to develop and apply new ideas. That is why the government is providing specific support for innovation.

The bill provides a total of $112.5 million for innovation grants over the five-year period, which is $5 million a year more than would have been available under the TCF Post-2005 (SIP) Scheme.

As is the case under the existing scheme, grants under the Clothing and Household Textile Building Innovative Capability Scheme will be paid annually and in arrears and will be subject to robust compliance monitoring.
The bill follows an extensive consultation process that started last year when the government commissioned Professor Roy Green to review Australia’s textile, clothing and footwear industries.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2009 GST ADMINISTRATION MEASURES) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Dr Emerson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (9.23 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The amendments to this bill implement a number of recommendations made by the Board of Taxation in its recent review of GST administration. The focus of the measures is to reduce GST administration costs and to streamline and remove anomalies in the GST administration framework.

Schedule 1 amends the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999, the Fuel Tax Act 2006 and the Taxation Administration Act 1953 to provide that input tax credits and fuel tax credits must be claimed within a four-year period.

In contrast to other indirect tax liabilities and entitlements no effective limitation period currently applies to these credits. The current position is also not consistent with the basic policy underlying the tax law—that is, that taxpayers should generally have certainty about their tax position within a fixed period.

The amendments will result in entitlements to input tax credits ceasing after four years. However, they provide exceptions to the four-year restriction so that, where GST may be borne after four years, taxpayers can potentially also claim associated input tax credits.

The amendments apply to claims for input tax credits made after 7.30 pm Australian Eastern Standard Time on 12 May 2009. This reflects that the amendments implement an integrity measure designed to provide symmetry between the period that taxpayers have a liability for GST on transactions and the period that credits can be claimed. The amendments relating to fuel tax credits will apply from 1 July 2010. This reflects that the Fuel Tax Act 2006 came into operation on 1 July 2006 and therefore the four-year restriction can have no application to fuel tax credits until 1 July 2010.

Schedule 2 amends the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 and the A New Tax System (Wine Equalisation Tax) Act 1999 to extend the Tourist Refund Scheme to allow residents of Australian external territories (such as Norfolk, Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands) to claim refunds of GST or GST and wine equalisation tax for goods separately exported to the external territories. The current rules for goods taken as accompanied baggage will continue to apply.

The amendments made by this schedule apply in relation to goods acquired, and wine purchased, on or after 1 July 2010.

Schedule 3 amends the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 so that intermediaries that facilitate transactions but are not common-law agents will be able to use the simplified accounting provisions of the GST act. These procedures include the
The amendments will extend these arrangements to other intermediaries, such as billing agents and paying agents. This will lower the compliance costs of intermediaries, principals and third parties. The amendments apply from 1 July 2010.

Schedule 4 amends the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 to clarify how the GST law applies to gambling operators making GST-free supplies, including where the operators accept wagers from entities outside Australia.

The amendments confirm that if a wager is GST-free then the prize money liable to be paid out on that wager will not result in a reduction in the GST payable. The Commissioner of Taxation administers the GST law in this way and the amendment will remove any uncertainty in the current operation of the law. The amendments apply from the first quarterly tax period on or after royal assent.

Schedule 5 amends the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999, the A New Tax System (Luxury Car Tax) Act 1999 and the Fuel Tax Act 2006 to specify that overpaid refunds are due and payable from the date of overpayment. These amendments take effect from the start of the first quarterly tax period after royal assent.

Currently, there is inconsistent treatment between those taxpayers who incorrectly determine their liability to pay GST or other indirect taxes and taxpayers who incorrectly determine their entitlement to a refund.

Schedule 6 amends the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 to address anomalous outcomes that may arise as a result of the interaction between various GST provisions in relation to supplies between associates for no consideration. In particular, the current provisions may apply to treat an otherwise input taxed or GST-free supply to an associate, if it had been made for consideration, as a taxable supply where it is made for no consideration. These amendments take effect from the date of royal assent.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.
between fixed trusts with the same beneficiaries, each of which has the same interests in each trust.

This will ensure that capital gains tax considerations are not an undue impediment to the restructure of those trusts, whilst ensuring that subsequent changes to the manner and extent to which beneficiaries can benefit from the trusts are subject to appropriate tax consequences.

Schedule 2 removes significant income tax impediments to mergers between complying superannuation funds. These amendments will permit eligible entities to roll over capital losses and revenue losses under the merger and to transfer previously realised capital losses and revenue losses.

The loss relief will be available for complying superannuation funds that merge with another complying superannuation fund with five or more members. The loss relief will preserve the offsetting value of the losses, thereby removing a potential barrier to superannuation fund consolidation.

This measure will assist in maintaining a robust and efficient superannuation sector. The measure has a limited period of application from 24 December 2008 until 30 June 2011.

Schedule 3 amends the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 to clarify the circumstances in which income derived by life insurance companies in respect of immediate annuity business qualifies as non-assessable non-exempt income.

The annuity conditions that must be satisfied for an annuity policy to qualify for exemption have been rewritten to make the law clearer and to clarify the circumstances in which they apply. These changes have been sought by business groups and apply from 1 July 2000.

The amendments also ensure that the annuity conditions do not apply to immediate annuity policies that provide for superannuation income streams.

This ensures that life insurance companies are taxed on superannuation income stream business in the same way as all other superannuation income stream providers. These changes apply from the 2007-08 income year.

Schedule 4 amends the list of deductible gift recipients (DGRs) in the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997. Taxpayers can claim income tax deductions for certain gifts to organisations with DGR status. DGR status will assist the listed organisations to attract public support for their activities.

This schedule adds two new organisations to the act, namely the Green Institute and the United States Studies Centre. It also changes the name of one organisation currently listed in the act from the ‘Dymocks Literacy Foundation Limited’ to ‘Dymocks Children’s Charities Limited’.

Schedule 5 exempts from income tax the income recovery subsidy payment for the north-west Queensland floods of January and February 2009.

This payment was available to Australian resident employees, small business owners and farmers over 16 years of age who could demonstrate that they experienced a loss of income as a direct result of the north-west Queensland floods in January and February 2009.

Eligible recipients must also have demonstrated that they derived an income or resided in the affected area within a designated time period. The payment was a Newstart-like payment designed to provide immediate financial assistance to disaster victims.

Schedule 6 clarifies the excise law to ensure that imported high-strength spirits
blended with domestically produced high-strength spirits are free of duty under the concessional spirits scheme, with effect from the date of royal assent.

These spirits are generally not intended for consumption as an alcoholic beverage and the proposed changes will allow current practice to continue.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

**INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2009**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Dr Emerson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Dr Emerson (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (9.34 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I introduce the bill to give the force of law to a new tax treaty with New Zealand, a second protocol to the tax treaty with Belgium and an agreement on the allocation of taxing rights over certain income with Jersey.

Tax treaties facilitate trade and investment by reducing barriers caused by double taxation. The extremely close and significant economic relationship between Australia and New Zealand increases the importance of maintaining up-to-date tax arrangements between both countries. The new tax treaty, signed in Paris on 26 June 2009, strengthens and enhances this relationship.

The treaty updates and modernises the bilateral tax arrangements between Australia and New Zealand. The bill will insert the text of the new treaty into the International Tax Agreements Act 1953 and repeal the existing treaty.

Responding to the needs of both Australian and New Zealand taxpayers, the new treaty comprehensively updates the existing tax treaty arrangements with New Zealand. There are six key outcomes from the treaty. The treaty reduces withholding taxes on certain intercorporate dividends and completely removes them from others. The treaty removes withholding tax on interest payments made to unrelated financial institutions or to the Australian and New Zealand governments. It lowers royalty withholding tax. Australian managed investment trusts will be brought within the scope of treaty benefits. The treaty also provides for the cross-recognition of the tax-exempt status of pensions in both Australia and New Zealand. Last, the treaty contains a short-term secondment provision which will preclude individuals from being caught up in the other country’s tax system when they are seconded to that other country for less than 90 days.

Integrity provisions in the treaty will ensure that the reduced withholding tax rates are only available to those genuinely entitled to them. In addition, as New Zealand does not have a comprehensive capital gains tax, the treaty allows Australia to tax capital gains derived by Australian residents who relocate to New Zealand for up to six years after they cease to be an Australian resident, thereby preventing the double non-taxation of such capital gains.

The treaty will enter into force following the last notification that both countries have completed their domestic requirements, which, in the case of Australia, includes enactment of this bill.

The bill will also amend the definition of ‘dual listed company arrangement’ in the
income tax law to align it with the corresponding provision in the treaty with New Zealand.

The government is committed to the implementation of international standards of tax transparency. The second protocol to the tax treaty with Belgium upgrades the exchange-of-information provisions in the tax treaty between Australia and Belgium by enhancing the ability of the Belgian and Australian tax authorities to exchange taxpayer information and to exchange on a wider range of taxes.

In particular, the new provisions provide that neither tax administration can refuse to provide information solely because they do not require the information for their own domestic purposes or because the information is held by a bank or similar institution.

The government is a global leader in combating cross-border tax evasion. The enhanced provisions with Belgium are an important tool in Australia’s efforts in this regard, by increasing the probability of detection when taxpayers participate in abusive tax arrangements.

The tax information exchange agreement, together with the agreement for the allocation of certain taxing rights, signed with Jersey earlier this year, are further evidence of the government’s commitment in this area.

The bill gives effect to the agreement on the allocation of taxing rights between Australia and Jersey, which will help prevent double taxation of certain cross-border income derived by individuals who are residents of Australia or Jersey. The agreement also provides an administrative mechanism to help resolve transfer-pricing disputes that may arise between taxpayers and the revenue authorities of Australia or Jersey.

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has considered these treaties and recommended that binding treaty action be taken in relation to all three treaties.

Full details of the amendments brought forward in the bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING ACCREDITATION) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Roxon.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.39 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Bill 2009 will broaden the scope of the Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation Scheme (the scheme).

When stage 1 of the scheme was introduced in 2008, the accreditation arrangements only covered practices providing radiology services. The scheme did not cover non-radiology services, such as cardiac ultrasound, angiography, obstetric and gynaecological ultrasound or nuclear medicine imaging services, which account for around 16 per cent of the total number of Medicare funded diagnostic imaging services performed annually.

From 1 July next year, with the commencement of stage 2 of the scheme, the scope of the scheme will be broadened to cover all diagnostic imaging services (radiology and non-radiology) in the Health Insurance (Diagnostic Imaging Services Table) Regulations 2009. Any practices that are intending to render diagnostic imaging services for the purpose of Medicare benefits will need to be accredited under stage 2 of the scheme.
Accreditation is a well-recognised tool for promoting, reviewing and improving systems of health care and for fostering continuous quality improvement. Patients who attend an accredited diagnostic imaging practice can be confident that defined standards of care guide the delivery of those services.

The impetus for broadening the scope of stage 2 of the scheme and providing arrangements to transition non-radiology practices into stage 2 of the scheme is not a reflection on the quality of services as they are currently being provided but a focus on providing a consistent standard of diagnostic imaging services regardless of where or how they are provided.

Diagnostic imaging services are provided, and are being increasingly provided, by a diverse range of practitioner groups, including specialist radiologists, vascular surgeons, cardiologists, general practitioners, obstetricians, gynaecologists, nuclear medicine physicists and sports physicians. These services are provided in a range of practice settings, such as hospitals, single practitioner practices and multisite corporate practices. They take place in a variety of clinical contexts such as in conjunction with surgical procedures or as part of routine or emergency investigations to exclude or confirm injury or disease. Given this diversity, it is important to ensure that all the elements involved in the delivery of diagnostic imaging services are working together effectively.

Through the implementation of the stage 2 scheme, the government and the community can be assured that the 19.5 million or so diagnostic imaging services that are supported by Medicare annually are being provided by organisations that are able to meet specified standards and that the over $2.2 billion taxpayer funded investment in those services is being used effectively. Broadening the scope of the accreditation scheme to cover all diagnostic imaging services will ensure consistency and uniformity across the whole diagnostic imaging sector.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Health Insurance Amendment (Diagnostic Imaging Accreditation) Act 2007 to provide transitional arrangements so that practices delivering non-radiology services, or a combination of non-radiology and radiology services that are not accredited under the scheme, will be able to enter into the next stage of the scheme by registering for ‘deemed accreditation’ from 1 April next year until 30 June with an approved accreditor.

Practices in operation before 1 July 2010 providing both non-radiology services and radiology services and who have been accredited for radiology services under stage 1 of the scheme will not be required to register for ‘deemed accreditation’ as they will be automatically accredited until 30 June 2012.

Registering for ‘deemed accreditation’ will require approximately 1,400 practices that are currently providing non-radiology services, or a combination of non-radiology and radiology services not accredited under the scheme, to lodge a form with an approved accreditor. This will be a relatively simple process. The proprietor or responsible person will need to complete a form nominating the site to which ‘deemed accreditation’ will apply by specifying the location specific practice number and the name and contact details of the proprietor.

Once the approved accreditor receives the registration form with an application fee (if any) by 30 June 2010, the practice will be deemed to be accredited for the purpose of the stage 2 scheme and will have 12 months to obtain accreditation before 1 July 2011.

Diagnostic imaging services are a vital tool in the detection, measurement, treatment and management of clinical conditions. Pa-

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tients should be confident that the standard of diagnostic imaging services is regularly reviewed. It is not unreasonable for them to expect a standard level of service regardless of how and where a Medicare eligible diagnostic imaging service is provided.

The Department of Health and Ageing has consulted comprehensively with members of the diagnostic imaging profession and industry. Feedback from these organisations suggests that the proposal to include non-radiology practices in the stage 2 scheme from 1 July 2010 is supported.

The department has also written to, and met with, members of the professional bodies representing the providers of non-radiology services. These groups include the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand; and the Australian and New Zealand Association of Physicians in Nuclear Medicine.

The department released an information paper to around 30 professional and industry organisations, representing providers of both radiology and non-radiology services, in February 2009. This paper outlined the proposals for transitioning providers of non-radiology services into the stage 2 scheme by 1 July next year.

The arrangements for practices providing non-radiology services are intended to enable their incremental participation and to keep the burden of compliance to a minimum.

The new entrants to the stage 2 scheme will be introduced to accreditation in much the same way as practices providing radiology services were introduced to accreditation when the stage 1 scheme commenced on 1 July 2008. The stage 1 scheme arrangements for practices providing radiology services have been well received, with around 2,700 practices currently participating. The transitional arrangements in this bill for providers of non-radiology services will replicate those successful arrangements for the stage 1 scheme and build on the already established accreditation framework.

Introducing the accreditation requirements incrementally will ensure that practices providing non-radiology services will have ample time to prepare for and comply with the accreditation requirements and that access to Medicare benefits will be less likely to be interrupted from 1 July 2010, when the stage 2 scheme commences.

Accreditation provides a mechanism by which the government can be assured that services funded under Medicare are being provided only by organisations that are performing against an endorsed set of standards. Furthermore, patients expect and should be confident that their health care is provided within a framework for continuous improvement, where safety and quality is paramount. This bill will deliver on those objectives and I commend it to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.
The first group of amendments is to schedule three further parcels of land in the Northern Territory so that they can be granted as Aboriginal land. These three parcels of land are Alice Valley Extension (East), Loves Creek and Patta (near Tennant Creek).

The Loves Creek parcel of land is subject to a partially heard land claim. Scheduling this land under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 follows agreement between the Central Land Council and the Northern Territory government. The scheduling will resolve the claim and allow the land to be granted to the appropriate Aboriginal land trust.

Patta (near Tennant Creek) is also the subject of an agreement between the Central Land Council and the Northern Territory government. Granting this land will form part of an agreement for settling broader native title claims.

The Alice Valley Extension (East) parcel of land will be leased by the land trust to the Northern Territory as an extension of the West MacDonnell National Park.

The bill makes some amendments to the income management provisions in the social security law to improve their operation in minor respects.

Firstly, the bill will allow people in the Cape York welfare reform areas who are receiving age pension or carer payment to have their payments income managed. As with other payments that are income managed for people in Cape York, the new provisions will rely on the local Family Responsibilities Commission issuing a notice and relevant conditions being met. This change has been requested by the Families Responsibilities Commission.

Secondly, amendments are made relating to the use of residual funds in an income management account when a person returns to income management. The amendments will ensure that any residual amounts being disbursed are retained in the person’s income management account at the time when they return to income management.

Thirdly, changes are being made to how residual amounts left in an income management account are dealt with when a customer dies.

Depending on how much is left in the account, these residual amounts may currently be paid to the deceased customer’s legal personal representative or to a person carrying out certain activities in relation to the estate or affairs of the deceased person. However, if the customer has no legal personal representative, or if there is more than one person carrying out the relevant activities, it can be hard to determine who to pay the residual amounts to. These amendments will provide further options to disburse the residual amounts in these cases.

The bill makes amendments to improve the operation of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal across its social security, family assistance and child support jurisdictions.

For example, the bill makes changes to titles for tribunal members, such as renaming the executive director to principal member. The bill removes the requirement for the principal member to chair panels on which he or she sits by enabling the principal member to determine who will be the presiding member. The bill allows the SSAT to convene a pre-hearing conference for social security and family assistance law appeals. If parties reach agreement at the pre-hearing conference, the SSAT is empowered to make a decision in accordance with the agreement.

In the first of two measures about the income support means test, an amendment will
clarify that a gift that has been returned does not have to be assessed as a deprived asset under the social security disposal of assets provisions. This removes a potentially harsh outcome under the current provisions for a person who disposes of an asset in certain circumstances, has it counted as an asset on that basis and then has it counted again as a returned asset.

Further amendments clarify that, where a customer is the beneficiary of a discretionary trust, and the trustee has a duty to maintain the customer, then the trust should be assessed as being a controlled private trust in respect of that beneficiary. The amendments also make it clear that, when the controllers of a trust are being determined, it should not be relevant that there are other future beneficiaries of the trust when those parties are not currently receiving any benefits from the trust. These amendments secure longstanding policy in light of a recent full Federal Court case.

The remaining amendments in the bill provide a requirement for a claimant to notify if a child who attracted baby bonus leaves the claimant’s care within 26 weeks of birth or coming into their care and make further minor and technical amendments. I comment the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Mirabella) adjourned.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WELFARE REFORM AND REINSTATEMENT OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Macklin.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (9.53 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill amends the social security law, the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 (NTNER Act) and other laws giving effect to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

It introduces landmark reforms to the welfare system which, over time, will see the national rollout of a new scheme of income management of welfare payments in disadvantaged regions across Australia.

Income management is a key tool in the government’s broader welfare reforms to deliver on our commitment to a welfare system based on the principles of engagement, participation and responsibility.

Welfare should not be a destination or a way of life.

The government is committed to progressively reforming the welfare system to foster individual responsibility and to provide a platform for people to move up and out of welfare dependence.

The reforms included in this bill tackle the destructive, intergenerational cycle of passive welfare:

- By quarantining 50 per cent of regular welfare payments and 100 per cent of lump sum payments, to make sure money is spent on life’s essentials and in the best interests of children.
- By setting objective and clear criteria that will determine if an individual is subject to income management.
- By offering evidence based incentives and responsibility targeted exemptions to families who demonstrate responsible parenting and to young people and long-
term unemployed who take personal initiative through participation in education or training. Personal money management and saving will also be rewarded.

Individuals will also be able to voluntarily sign up to the new income management scheme and will be eligible for incentives when they do so.

From 1 July, 2010, the new scheme will start in urban, regional and remote areas of the Northern Territory, which has the highest proportion of severely disadvantaged communities in Australia.

Existing powers for income management in prescribed Indigenous communities will be repealed.

This bill honours the government’s commitment to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Racial Discrimination Act) in relation to the NTER legislation.

The bill also provides the legislative basis to underpin the sustainable, long-term development phase of the NTER. The government will continue to take strong action to close the gap in the Northern Territory, working in close partnership with Indigenous Australians, recognising that they are central to developing effective solutions and driving change.

Since November 2007, the Australian government has strengthened and expanded the allocation of resources to the Northern Territory Emergency Response, investing more than $1.2 billion extra to help overcome decades of government failure.

However, the NTER will never achieve robust long-term outcomes if measures rely on the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act.

Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory were consulted on eight measures outlined in the government’s Future Directions discussion paper: income management, alcohol and pornography restrictions, five-year leases, community stores, controls on the use of publicly funded computers, law enforcement powers and business management areas powers.

The consultations were unprecedented in scale and conducted intensively over more than three months. More than 500 meetings were held.

The government has listened to what people had to say and has considered their extensive and valuable feedback. The consultations have informed our approach to the changes proposed through this bill.

The government believes that the NTER has improved the wellbeing of Aboriginal Territorians living in the prescribed areas. Nevertheless, the government recognises that much more needs to be done. The bill will strengthen the NTER by reinstating the Racial Discrimination Act. The government believes that all NTER measures are either special measures under the Racial Discrimination Act or non-discriminatory and therefore consistent with the Racial Discrimination Act.

Restrictions on alcohol and pornography will remain. The evidence shows that community solutions to restrict alcohol can be more effective than blanket restrictions and, for this reason, the government has decided to allow evidence based variations to the alcohol restrictions at the request of a community under certain circumstances.

The five-year leases under the NTER have been adjusted to ensure the areas involved are minimised and compensation is paid and to ensure that they are utilised in beneficial ways.

The community store licensing regime has been strengthened to further enhance food security in remote communities.
The law enforcement powers of the Australian Crime Commission will be adjusted so that the use of the special powers under the NTER are for the benefit of Indigenous victims of crime.

The government has decided to continue with the controls on the use of publicly funded computers and business management areas powers without change. The government considers these to be special measures.

While the consultations revealed a variety of views about income management, many participants reported that income management had delivered discernible benefits, particularly to children, women, older people and families.

More money was being spent on food, clothing and school related expenses; people were saving for large purchases such as fridges and washing machines; less money was being spent on alcohol, gambling, cigarettes and drugs; and ‘humbugging’ had decreased.

From 1 July 2010, a new income management scheme will start across the Northern Territory—in urban, regional and remote areas—as a first step in a future national rollout of income management to disadvantaged regions. It will apply to all welfare recipients within the specified categories and is thus a non-discriminatory measure and consistent with the Racial Discrimination Act.

**The Racial Discrimination Act 1975**

This bill meets the government’s commitment to introduce legislation into the parliament in 2009 so that the Racial Discrimination Act applies to the NTER.

A key feature of the bill is the repeal of provisions that modify the application of:

- the Racial Discrimination Act in relation to the NTER, the Queensland Family Responsibilities Commission and approved programs of work for income support;
- Northern Territory anti-discrimination laws in relation to the NTER and approved programs of work for income support; and
- Queensland anti-discrimination laws for the purpose of the Queensland Family Responsibilities Commission.

This bill also contains a number of amendments to the existing NTER measures. Apart from the income management scheme, which is designed to apply in a non-discriminatory fashion to any citizen in the Northern Territory within the specified categories, the government has redesigned a number of the other measures dealt with by this bill so that they are more sustainable and more clearly special measures under the Racial Discrimination Act.

The bill removes the provisions that deem the legislation and acts done under the legislation to be special measures, as those provisions could be said to have the indirect effect of suspending parts of the Racial Discrimination Act. However, this does not alter the fact that the government considers that the redesigned measures are special measures under the Racial Discrimination Act.

Special measures help people of a particular race to enjoy their human rights equally with others. They are an important part of the Racial Discrimination Act because they allow governments, when it is necessary, to make special laws to ensure the protection of the human rights of the people who need it most.

The government understands the important decisions that need to be made before introducing special measures. The government has given careful consideration to the need for these laws as a necessary and appropriate way to address the challenges fac-
ing Indigenous people in the Northern Terri-
tory and as part of the transition of the NTER to the long-term development phase. The
NTER measures that are special measures are all time limited.

Alcohol Restrictions

Alcohol misuse continues to be a threat to the safety of Aboriginal women, children and the elderly and is one of the most serious issues facing Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

Under the NTER, new laws were introduced to ban drinking, possessing or supplying alcohol in or transporting alcohol into a prescribed area. There were a small number of exemptions to allow licensed premises with controlled drinking hours to continue to operate and provisions to monitor takeaway sales of alcohol across the whole of the Northern Territory.

Overall, a strong view emerged from the consultations that alcohol controls are required. Some communities wanted the existing strong restrictions to remain in place but there was a widespread view that the current one size fits all approach to alcohol restrictions may not be the most effective way to minimise alcohol harm.

The government will retain the existing alcohol restrictions but, with the Northern Territory government, will work with communities to implement locally negotiated alcohol management plans which meet a number of criteria.

These include hard evidence in each community that the proposed changes will lead to a reduction in the level of alcohol related harm in that area.

The government will closely monitor trends in alcohol related harm in communities and, if it is necessary, will have the capacity to reimpose alcohol measures.

The consultations showed also that many people felt a sense of shame and humiliation about signs relating to alcohol restrictions and prohibited material placed outside their communities. The government agrees that a more flexible approach to the placement and wording of signs is required, and the proposed changes to the NTNER Act reflect this approach. The proposed changes to the act remove the existing rigid requirements on where signs must be erected and allow more discretion on the wording used.

Northern Territory police were given the authority to, without warrant, enter a private residence and apprehend and take into custody a person who was believed to be intoxicated. In response to community concerns about these powers, the NTNER Act will be amended. Police will only have that power in a particular prescribed area if someone from that area has requested that police be allowed that power.

The existing provisions in the NTNER Act that relate to record keeping for takeaway alcohol services exceeding $100 or of more than five litres of wine will be repealed because they have not been effective.

Restrictions on pornography

The Northern Territory emergency response also placed restrictions on the possession and supply of sexually explicit and very violent films, publications and computer games in prescribed areas of the Northern Territory.

These prohibitions have been retained following consideration of the views expressed during the consultations. Many respondents said that they did not want pornography in their communities and they wanted some form of restriction left in place.

This bill provides that, if people living in prescribed areas believe that the restrictions are no longer necessary, an application can be made to remove them.
Lifting restrictions will require consultation by the minister with law enforcement agencies and the Minister for Home Affairs. The history of violence or sexual abuse in the community will be taken into account, as well as any evidence that children have been exposed to pornography and whether residents believe that existing restrictions should continue to apply.

A declaration to remove the restrictions on prohibited material under the NTER legislation would mean that these areas would be subject to the same restrictions on sexually explicit and violent material as in other parts of the Northern Territory.

**Law enforcement powers**

The current provisions enable the Australian Crime Commission to use its powers in relation to serious violence or child abuse committed by or against, or involving, an Indigenous person.

The bill will restrict the use of powers to where serious violence or child abuse is committed against an Indigenous person.

This will ensure the Australian Crime Commission’s use of its special powers in relation to violence and child abuse is for the benefit of Indigenous victims of crime.

**Five-year leases**

The government currently holds five-year leases over 64 Northern Territory communities. All leases expire by the end of August 2012.

This bill confirms the beneficial intent of the five-year leases to improve the delivery of services and promote economic and social development.

The bill ensures that the leases are permitted to be used for these purposes and not for other uses such as mining. It also ensures that administration of the leases must also follow guidelines on the use of land and be conducted in a manner which respects Aboriginal people and culture.

The government is committed to the progressive transition of the five-year leases to voluntary leases and the bill obliges the Commonwealth, at the request of landowners, to negotiate voluntary leases in good faith. The leases have already been improved by a substantial reduction in lease boundaries and the payment of rent has commenced, based on independent valuations undertaken by the Northern Territory Valuer-General.

**Community stores**

This bill supports the government’s ongoing commitment to build a best practice model for the operation of community stores, reflecting their contribution to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

Under the Northern Territory emergency response, community stores in prescribed areas of the Northern Territory are able to be assessed and licensed if they meet requirements.

This bill provides an explicit food security objective for stores licensing and establishes a legislative link between community store licensing and the eligibility of a store to participate in the income management arrangements.

The new provisions strengthen the governance of community stores and provide a wider range of options to intervene where stores are not meeting licensing requirements. The amendments also provide for review of key licensing decisions by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

**Income management**

Income management helps people to order their lives and provide for their children. It operates at the day-to-day level of people’s lives, giving them access to the basics of life by reducing the amount of welfare funds available for substance abuse and other risky
behaviours. This in turn provides a pathway for their participation in the broader economy and society.

The government has already implemented a range of strategies in the interests of children including:

- the Cape York welfare reform trial in Queensland;
- income management for child protection in Western Australia;
- the school enrolment and attendance measure in the Northern Territory and Queensland;
- voluntary income management in Western Australia; and
- the learn or earn strategy, which puts requirements on parents and young people to make sure those young people are participating in education, training or employment.

The measures included in this bill build on and expand these strategies.

In the Northern Territory, more than half of parents interviewed in four prescribed areas for an evaluation of income management compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reported that their children were eating more, weighed more and were healthier.

The Northern Territory emergency response redesign consultations identified that income management had delivered discernable benefits. While there was a divergence of views, the majority of comments said that income management should continue. In the tier 2 meetings, people frequently said that income management should apply to all welfare recipients across Australia.

The government recognises the benefits that income management can have for other disadvantaged regions.

From 1 July 2010, a new scheme of income management will begin to be implemented, as a first step, in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of severely disadvantaged locations in Australia.

The categories of people that the new income management arrangements will apply to are:

- people aged 15 to 24 who have been in receipt of specified payments for more than three months such as youth allowance and parenting payment;
- people aged 25 and above on specified payments such as Newstart allowance and parenting payment for more than 12 months;
- people referred for income management by child protection authorities; and
- people assessed by Centrelink social workers as requiring income management due to vulnerability as a result of financial crisis, domestic violence or economic abuse.

The government has chosen these groups based on their need for support due to their high risk of social isolation and disengagement, poor financial literacy, and participation in risky behaviours.

In addition, people can choose to voluntarily opt into the income management arrangements.

The new scheme allows people in the first two categories to seek exemptions from income management by providing evidence that they are undertaking responsible parenting, or, for those without children, engaging in study, or participating in employment. The new scheme will also include incentives for voluntary income management, and a matched savings scheme for participants in compulsory income management. This re-
reflects our commitment to using income management as a tool to assist people.

The operation of the new scheme of income management in the Northern Territory will be carefully evaluated. The first evaluation progress report is expected in 2011-12. The other income management trials currently underway in Western Australia and Queensland will also continue to be evaluated. Future rollout elsewhere in Australia will be informed by the evidence gained from this evaluation activity. Future implementation will also be informed by other criteria, including evidence of disadvantage in other regions of Australia and consideration of where income management could benefit individuals and families.

To assist future decision making, the government will also be offering a limited number of interested Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory the opportunity to consider the development of an additional community-based approach to re-establishing social norms, drawing on the learnings from the Cape York welfare reform trial.

The new scheme of income management has been designed to be non-discriminatory for the purposes of the Racial Discrimination Act. The Racial Discrimination Act will apply in relation to the new scheme of income management from commencement of implementation in July 2010.

The government has set out its approach to the legislation in a policy statement. The measures contained in this bill give effect to the government decisions outlined in that statement.

**Conclusion**

This bill meets our commitment:

- to re-instate the Racial Discrimination Act and its application to the Northern Territory emergency response;
- retain the benefits of welfare reform; and
- to extend the benefits of income management to the wider community.

It provides a stronger legislative basis for the current Northern Territory emergency response measures and lays the foundations for sustainable development across remote communities in the Northern Territory.

It demonstrates our commitment to sustained, long-term action in the Northern Territory, working in partnership with Indigenous Australians to develop and drive policies and programs to close the gap.

The bill tackles, on a national scale, the entrenched cycle of passive welfare through a new system of income management and incentives to support people moving from welfare to personal responsibility and independence.

The bill reflects the government’s determination to put children and families at the centre of our welfare reform agenda.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Dr Stone) adjourned.

**BUSINESS**

**Rearrangement**

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (10.18 am)—I move:

That business intervening before Notice No. 12, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

**INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr McClelland.

Bill read a first time.
Second Reading

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (10.19 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

Over time, international arbitration has developed as a practical, efficient and well-established method of settling commercial disputes without resorting to national courts.

Arbitration is typically faster, less formal and more tailored to the particular dispute than court proceedings whilst at the same time retaining the benefits of impartial expert adjudication.

Arbitral awards are also more readily enforceable around the world than are judgments of national courts.

Finally, arbitration is a method of dispute resolution that is chosen and controlled quite frequently by the parties.

This helps the parties to preserve their commercial relationship and resolve their dispute in a manner that suits their needs and is more likely to preserve their ongoing relationship.

The New York convention and the UNCITRAL model law

There are two pillars that underpin the modern system of international commercial arbitration.

The first is the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards done at New York on 10 June 1958—commonly referred to as the New York convention.

The convention provides crucial support to international trade by ensuring that arbitral agreements and awards are enforceable as between the 144 contracting states.

This means that commercial parties can turn to arbitration in full confidence that the award made by the arbitral tribunal will be enforceable throughout the world.


The model law was developed by UNCITRAL as a basis on which countries may choose to draft their own legislation governing international arbitration.

The model law was developed to address the wide divergence of approaches taken to international arbitration throughout the world and to provide a modern and easily adapted alternative to outdated national regimes.

As the explanatory note to the model law prepared by UNCITRAL states, ‘Since its adoption by UNCITRAL, the model law has come to represent the accepted international legislative standard for a modern arbitration law.’

The International Arbitration Act

In Australia, international arbitration is primarily regulated by the International Arbitration Act 1974.

The act implements Australia’s obligations under the New York convention to enforce and recognise foreign arbitration agreements and arbitral awards.

The act also gives the force of law to the UNCITRAL model law as the principal arbitral law governing the conduct of international commercial arbitrations in Australia.

Finally, the act also implements Australia’s obligations under the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States done at Washington on 18 March 1965.

Review of the International Arbitration Act

On 21 November 2008, I announced a review of the International Arbitration Act and
released a discussion paper to stimulate debate about the future of the act.

The reform measures I am presenting today are the product of the review’s work and have been developed following careful consideration of the more than 30 submissions made to the review as well as academic literature, court decisions and approaches that have been taken overseas.

**The International Arbitration Amendment Bill**

The reforms contained in the International Arbitration Amendment Bill will ensure the act remains at the forefront of international arbitration best practice.

It was very clear from the submissions received as part of the review that there was strong support for the provisions in this bill.

In particular, there was strong support for the retention of the UNCITRAL model law as the arbitral law governing international commercial arbitrations conducted in Australia.

Accordingly, rather than fundamentally alter the framework of the International Arbitration Act, the reforms to be enacted by the bill augment the act by addressing problems that have arisen in its application.

The reforms go further—however—by providing parties with a wider set of tools to help them resolve their disputes.

First, the bill will repeal section 21 of the act, which allows the parties to choose to resolve their dispute under a law other than the model law—such as one of the state commercial arbitration acts—a provision which has long been a source of confusion and concern.

Once amended, the act will provide a clear distinction between the application of Commonwealth legislation and state and territory legislation.

Secondly, the bill includes new interpretation provisions that are intended to provide greater guidance to the courts in exercising powers and functions under the act and in interpreting its provisions.

The bill will also clarify the circumstances in which the courts can refuse to recognise and enforce foreign awards.

One concern expressed in submissions to the review was that parties were finding increasingly novel ways to challenge awards and by doing so to delay the arbitral process.

These provisions are intended to emphasise the importance of speed, fairness and cost-effectiveness in international arbitration, while clearly defining and limiting the role of the courts in international arbitration without compromising the important protective function that the courts exercise.

Thirdly, the bill will implement a number of amendments to the model law adopted by UNCITRAL in 2006.

These amendments concern interpretation of the model law, the introduction of a more sophisticated regime for making and enforcing interim measures, and minor changes to authentication and translation requirements.

Further, the bill will introduce additional provisions to supplement the operation of the model law.

At present, the act includes a range of optional provisions that parties can use to help resolve their dispute.

These provisions address issues such as the consolidation of arbitral proceedings, interest and costs.

The bill will add a number of new tools to this set of optional provisions.

The parties will be able to select new provisions that allow the parties to obtain subpoenas and other court orders to assist with them with the process of arbitration.
The bill will enable the parties to select new provisions dealing with the disclosure of confidential information.

Other ‘opt in’ provisions address the death of a party to an arbitration agreement and revise the provisions concerning interest on a debt under an award.

Finally, the bill includes a range of other measures directed at improving the general operation of the act, including providing a more expansive definition of what constitutes an agreement in writing for the purposes of the New York convention.

**Jurisdiction of Courts**

The discussion paper that I have referred to, which I released in November 2008, raised the possibility of conferring exclusive jurisdiction under the act on the Federal Court of Australia.

The primary advantage of this approach, identified in the discussion paper, was that it may lead to more consistent jurisprudence in applying the act.

Since the discussion paper was released, the states and territories have evidenced an intention to adopt the model law as the basis for redrafting the commercial arbitration acts that apply to domestic arbitration in Australia.

This should result in a more uniform scheme at both the Commonwealth and the state and territory level.

Over time, applying the model law to both domestic and international arbitration should result in more consistent interpretation of its provisions.

Given the intention to adopt the model law in this way, the government has decided not to proceed with the conferment of exclusive jurisdiction on the Federal Court of Australia at this time.

The government understands the benefits that consistent jurisprudence would bring to the facilitation of international arbitration in Australia.

The government therefore encourages all courts to adopt procedures that ensure international arbitration cases are heard by judges with particular expertise in this area—and there are certainly a number of very talented judges throughout Australia.

One possibility for achieving this could be by having specialist international arbitration lists in the respective courts.

**Conclusion**

Speaking on the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the New York convention the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, stated:

... international trade thrives on the rule of law: without it parties are often reluctant to enter into cross-border commercial transactions and make international investments. Arbitration is an essential tool for doing business across borders.

This bill will not only assist Australian businesses in resolving their disputes but will ensure Australia is an attractive venue for parties from around the world to resolve their disputes. I thank my colleagues for their indulgence and I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Dr Stone) adjourned.

**FISHERIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Burke.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (10.28 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.
The Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill makes amendments to fisheries legislation in three distinct areas.

It will facilitate significant reform by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) of its administration of fishing in Commonwealth waters though the introduction of an innovative electronic decision-making system, known as ‘eLicensing’. It will also clarify the types of defensive equipment fisheries officers can carry when investigating suspected illegal fishing activities. Finally, it will clarify provisions regarding fish receiver licences in the Torres Strait.

The first measure, which facilitates electronic decision making, amends the Fisheries Management Act 1991 to provide an express power for AFMA to arrange for certain licensing decisions to be made electronically. This measure will significantly assist AFMA to achieve its legislative objective of implementing efficient and cost-effective fisheries management on behalf of the Commonwealth.

AFMA has invested significant resources into the development of eLicensing. It is the central component of a package of electronic services being introduced by AFMA that are aimed at improving the cost-effective management of Commonwealth fisheries, and improving the capacity of industry to manage their day-to-day business processes via the internet. The mechanism is a self-service portal developed by AFMA, known as ‘GOFish’.

GOFish allows fishing concession holders to log in via the internet and complete a range of licensing transactions, such as transferring fishing concessions, nominating a vessel to their fishing concession, updating their client information, viewing their quota holdings, and applying for the re-grant of a permit on the expiry of the previous permit.

The eLicensing system enables a range of high-volume, routine licensing decisions under the act to be made electronically. The system is expected to provide a much higher standard of service, especially as the fishing industry will be able to make ‘real-time’ transactions for routine administrative functions. AFMA anticipates that 80 per cent of transactions will be conducted through eLicensing by 2011.

The bill authorises AFMA to approve the use of a computer program, under AFMA’s control, to make decisions under specified provisions of the Fisheries Management Act 1991. The specified decisions to be made will be high-volume, routine decisions that do not require the exercise of judgement by an AFMA officer.

For example, where a fishing concession holder applies for a permit upon the expiry of the previous permit, the only relevant considerations—which are built into the rules applied by the computer program—might be that all outstanding levies have been paid and the concession holder is not the subject of any compliance action.

Complex decisions—that is, decisions that require the exercise of discretion—will be identified by the system and referred for manual processing by an AFMA officer.

As with any decision made electronically, it is possible that on occasion the computer program may make an incorrect decision. For example, this may occur because of a data entry error, or a virus that affects the program. The bill provides AFMA with express authority in these circumstances to revoke and replace the decision with a correct decision that would have been made had it been processed manually by an AFMA officer.

It should be noted that participation in eLicensing will be optional, although user testing of GOFish with industry indicates...
that most industry members will elect to use the service. This testing has also shown eLicensing to be fast, reliable and user friendly and there is an expectation that it will result in lower costs for the fishing industry.

In this respect, I note that eLicensing was developed in consultation with the fishing industry via the AFMA Cost Reduction Working Group, and is expected to result in cost savings for both AFMA and industry. A reduction in AFMA's administrative costs will directly result in a reduction in the costs passed onto industry through fees and annual levies.

Associated with eLicensing, the bill makes it easier for concession holders to transfer their fishing concessions. AFMA still maintains its licensing role, but rather than AFMA approving transfers of fishing concessions, AFMA will simply register transfers of fishing concessions. AFMA's discretion to refuse to register a transfer of a fishing concession will, however, apply to certain prescribed circumstances which will be limited and guided by policy considerations.

The removal of these trading impediments will allow the market to operate with greater efficiency, which will in turn enable AFMA to better achieve legislative objectives. This includes the objective of maximising the net economic returns to the Australian community from the management of Commonwealth fisheries.

The second measure which the bill facilitates is the issuing of defensive equipment to AFMA fisheries officers.

Under the Fisheries Management Act 1991, AFMA is responsible for the investigation of illegal fishing activities by both domestic and foreign fishers in the Australian Fishing Zone and Commonwealth managed fisheries.

Under revised arrangements with the states which came into force on 1 July 2009, AFMA compliance officers have taken on the more frontline role of conducting patrols and inspecting vessels. This role was previously undertaken by state and territory fisheries officers.

Work undertaken by AFMA compliance officers is potentially dangerous. There are a number of documented assaults against fisheries officers engaged in such work, and it is essential that these officers are adequately equipped and trained to ensure their own safety in appropriate circumstances.

While the ability of AFMA to issue officers with the necessary defensive equipment is implicit in the existing legislation, the bill will amend the Fisheries Management Act 1991 to provide express authority for Commonwealth officers to be issued with, and carry, prescribed defensive equipment in the course of their duties.

The equipment prescribed by the bill includes: bullet-proof vests, extendable batons, handcuffs, and any other equipment prescribed by regulations made under the Fisheries Management Act 1991.

Appropriately, the bill requires that officers are only authorised to carry and use defensive equipment if they have undertaken training in how to effectively, lawfully and safely carry, use and store the equipment.

The third measure of the bill will amend the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984 (the act).

Currently, an unintended regulatory burden is placed on individuals to comply with the act in order to avoid committing an offence. Previous amendments to the act, implemented under the Fisheries Legislation Amendment Act 2007, meant that in practice, all persons along the entire supply chain were required to hold a fish receiver licence. This arguably includes those who have mere
possession and control of fish but who do not intend to sell the fish.

The bill will amend the legislation to clarify those persons required to hold a fish receiver licence. This will support the implementation and integrity of an effective quota monitoring system in Torres Strait fisheries. Through these requirements, AFMA can quantify the commercial take of fish for stock assessment purposes and determine sustainable harvest levels.

Systems to regulate and monitor the amount of fish being caught for commercial purposes are paramount for effective fisheries management. The fish receiver licence is one of the measures that the Protected Zone Joint Authority will utilise as part of a quota monitoring system along with other reporting tools such as log books, docket books and catch disposal records.

The bill will therefore ensure that a fish receiver licence will be required by the appropriate persons within the Protected Zone who receive fish that they are intending to sell, but who do not have some other type of licence that requires them to report the fish that they handle. Or, if the fish is disposed of immediately outside the Protected Zone by a commercially licensed fisher or transporter, the first person in that chain who is intending to sell the fish, must hold a fish receiver licence.

A person intending to use the fish for personal consumption will not be required to hold a fish receiver licence.

In conclusion, the bill supports AFMA's obligations to reduce industry costs while continuing to offer a high standard of service and ensures that AFMA's officers possess the requisite defensive equipment in order to conduct their duties in a safe and effective manner.

Finally the bill requires that fish caught commercially in the Torres Strait are disposed for their sale or commercial processing only to the holder of a fish receiver licence.

Debate (on motion by Dr Stone) adjourned.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS MEASURES) BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Griffin.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr Griffin (Bruce—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs) (10.40 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present legislation that will give effect to a number of minor measures and amendments that will enhance the administration of the Veterans’ Affairs portfolio.

This bill will introduce measures that will improve the way we provide support to our veterans and Australian Defence Force personnel.

These changes will ensure Australia’s veteran and defence force communities receive the compensation, benefits and entitlements they deserve and in a timely manner.

They are a demonstration of the government’s commitment to continually review, update and improve the services and support we provide to our current and former military personnel.

The bill will extend eligibility to certain Australian Protective Service officers deployed at the Australian nuclear test sites for the period 20 October 1984 to 30 June 1988.

This period is within the extension period recently granted to Commonwealth and Australian Federal Police which was intended to
include Australian Protective Service officers for the duration of the extension.

However, due to organisational changes to the Australian Protective Service, Australian Protective Service officers were not eligible as nuclear test participants for the period 20 October 1984 to 30 June 1988.

This bill will rectify that situation.

The bill will also enable Defence Service Homes Insurance to pay a State Emergency Service levy, collected from Defence Service Homes Insurance policy holders, to the New South Wales government to assist with the cost of providing emergency services in that state.

In addition, the bill will extend, from three months to twelve months, the period within which claims for non-treatment related travel expenses may be lodged under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act.

This will benefit veterans and their dependants who travel for non-treatment related purposes such as attending review meetings or obtaining medical evidence.

Furthermore, the bill will enable certain entities under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act to specify the manner in which notices and other documents may be served.

This will ensure that the legal effect of such notices and documents is protected.

The bill will make it clear that the Specialist Medical Review Council may review a decision of the Repatriation Medical Authority to not amend a Statement of Principles.

The bill also provides for the Specialist Medical Review Council to review both versions of a Statement of Principles that relate to a particular condition even if an applicant has requested a review of only one of the Statements of Principles.

Other amendments in the bill will ensure that the policy in relation to an initial war or defence-caused injury or disease that is aggravated, or materially contributed to, by service under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act and the payment of a pension to the dependant of a veteran who was a prisoner of war, operate as originally intended.

The bill will protect the interests of certain compensation recipients under the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act by requiring that the compensation payment is made to an account in the recipient’s name.

Finally, the bill will enable a Victoria Cross recipient to receive both Victoria Cross allowance under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act and a Victoria Cross allowance or annuity from a foreign country.

These proposed changes will result in positive outcomes for many.

This bill continues the government’s ongoing commitment to supporting Australia’s current and former service personnel and their families and ensuring their wellbeing now and into the future.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Dr Stone) adjourned.

The bill reflects the Government’s commitment to maintaining the position of Australia’s Therapeutic Goods Administration, the TGA, as a leading global regulator of therapeutic goods and to continue to strengthen and enhance this well-deserved position.

This bill builds upon the other therapeutic goods reform bills approved by parliament over the past year to further strengthen and improve Australia’s therapeutic goods regulatory framework.

As I announced in late June during the introduction of the previous amendment bill, this bill includes a new regulatory framework for cellular and tissue based therapy products, known as biologicals, so these products can be regulated as a specific therapeutic goods group.

Implementation of the biologicals framework was agreed to in 2006 by the Australian Health Ministers’ Conference and it was among other improvements that were to have been adopted as part of the legislation underpinning the proposed Australia New Zealand Therapeutic Products Authority, or ANZTPA.

The Rudd government committed to moving forward to implement these improvements. We have delivered on that commitment with the majority of improvements now implemented through the reform bills that have been passed by the Parliament this year and in this current bill that I put before the House today.

Schedule 1 of this bill will implement a new framework for the regulation of biologicals and will bring Australia’s regulation of these products into line with other leading therapeutic goods regulators around the world including, importantly, the United States, Canada and the European Union.

Biologicals include such things as skin tissue for use in grafts following burns and bone for grafting.

It is envisaged that a legislative instrument will be made under the biologicals framework to declare that organs donated for transplantation and assisted reproductive tissues, such as IVF embryos, will not be classified as biologicals for regulation under the act. Instead organs will continue to be regulated by the Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplant Authority established by this government and assisted reproductive tissues will continue to be regulated under current arrangements.

The new framework will enable the overarching regulatory principles that apply to all other therapeutic goods to be adapted and applied to biologicals by including a new part 3-2A in the act. The principal benefit of the new biologicals part is its ability to apply different levels of pre- and post-market regulation requirements based on the relative risk of each biological.

It will also ensure that all biologicals used in Australia are properly assessed and regulated, as currently many are exempted and do not fit neatly under the medicines or medical devices frameworks.

To enable this to occur, classes of biologicals will be set out in the regulations to be made under this bill. The lowest class will include biologicals that are of a relatively low risk level while the other classes with apply to biologicals of incrementally higher risk levels. For example, those biologicals that have been extensively manipulated or are intended to be used for a purpose that is not their usual or original purpose would fall under the highest risk class.

The rigour of the application and assessment process and post-market monitoring for biologicals will be aligned to these risk-based classes, so that higher risk biologicals
will be required to provide a higher level of information to confirm their safety, quality and efficacy.

This approach means that sponsors of biologicals in lower risk classes are not required to comply with unnecessary requirements that are relevant only to higher risk biologicals.

Only those biologicals that are approved and included in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods or otherwise given an exemption under this new part will be able to be imported, exported, supplied or used in Australia. This is consistent with all other therapeutic goods such as medicines.

The new part will also apply criminal offence and civil penalty provisions to dealings with biologicals in the same way as they apply to other therapeutic goods. Were this not the case, the act would be inconsistent in its application, and sponsors of biologicals or other therapeutic goods might have an incentive to frame the claims in relation to the nature of their product so that it would come under the more lenient offence and civil penalty provisions.

A feature of the new part 3-2A for biologicals is its ability to deal flexibly with urgent medical circumstances. Unlike medicines which may be readily mass produced, biologicals are produced from cells and tissues. As a result the amount able to be produced and available on-hand at any one time may vary. Also, there will always be minor differences between biologicals of the same product—for example, bone tissue from one donor will not be exactly the same, obviously, as bone tissue derived from another donor.

The new part will require that all biologicals must meet certain standards and be manufactured according to good manufacturing practice.

However, there may be exceptional circumstances where a patient is critically ill and urgently requires a biological for treatment but none that conform to the requirements are available and no other approved therapeutic good is appropriate.

The part will provide that non-conforming biologicals can be used in such circumstances if—and only if—the patient’s doctor believes it is clinically necessary and the patient or their guardian consents.

The decision to use non-conforming biologicals in exceptional circumstances would be made as it is now on a case-by-case basis by the doctor and the patient or their guardian. It is important that this bill reflect the limited but critically important role for exceptional release.

The bill provides that details for exceptional release will be set out in the regulations. The requirements will be similar to those for access to unapproved medicines under category A of the current Special Access Scheme where patients are critically ill and no other approved therapeutic good is appropriate.

In implementing the new arrangements, the government is committed to making sure that sponsors and manufacturers of these products will be able to transition smoothly and easily to the new regulatory arrangements so that the supply of biologicals to those who need them will not be affected. As part of this commitment the government has undertaken extensive consultation with the industry over the past year, including explaining the proposed framework to sponsors and manufacturers and setting out the steps they will need to take to comply with the framework.

To further support the transition, the amendments in this bill establishing the framework will not commence until a date to be proclaimed within 12 months. This will
ensure that the remaining consultation and work on the supporting details, such as the product-specific standards, can be finalised and in place to commence at the same time.

Schedule 1 also includes specific transitional provisions for applications for inclusion of a biological in the register as a medicine or a device that are under consideration by the TGA at the time the new biologicals arrangements commence.

Those applications will continue to be assessed as either a medicine or a device depending on which group they are currently regulated under. Where the application is approved, the biological will then be included in the register and moved to that part for biologicals.

This will prevent applicants needing to make a new application or having the application assessment process being restarted or protracted as a result of the application being transferred for consideration by the biologicals assessment area. However, input is routinely provided by the biologicals assessors into these applications to ensure they meet the necessary standards.

The existing arrangements in relation to advertising of therapeutic goods, review of decisions and other general provisions in the act will be applied to biologicals in the same way that they are for other therapeutic goods.

Associated amendments will also be made to the Therapeutic Goods (Charges) Act 1989 to enable annual charges to be payable by sponsors to maintain the inclusion of their biological in the register. These charges apply to all therapeutic goods and reflect the work of the TGA to monitor products on an ongoing basis.

The biologicals industry sector has waited for a long time for this new framework and has begun readying itself to implement the new arrangements.

Turning now to schedule 2 of the bill, this schedule brings together the current range of somewhat inconsistent provisions that indemnify the minister, the secretary and others acting as required under the act and replaces these with a single provision.

This schedule does this by including a new section 61A in the act to provide that the Commonwealth, the minister, the secretary and others with powers and functions under the act, the National Manager of the TGA and others empowered or authorised to do certain things under the act can do so without fear that civil legal action can be taken against them for doing so, as long as they do not act in bad faith.

This is consistent with Commonwealth legislation for a number of other regulatory agencies, such as the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority Act 1998 and others.

In other amendments in the bill, schedule 3 will provide greater flexibility to recall specific batches of therapeutic goods where there are safety, quality, efficacy, presentation or performance concerns about only those affected batches.

Currently in some cases where there are safety, quality, efficacy, presentation or performance concerns the entire entry for the good must be suspended or cancelled in order to enable recall of batches to occur. This approach is unnecessary and excessive in some circumstances where only a small number of batches are affected.

Consistent with the provisions included in the Therapeutic Goods Amendment (2009 Measures No. 2) Act 2009 which enable information to be sought from a person who previously held a conformity assessment certificate for a medical device, schedule 4 of this bill enables information to be sought from people who previously had a medicine included in the register.
Schedule 5 clarifies that unpaid annual charges are a debt due to the Commonwealth to ensure that they are able to be recovered as the TGA operates on a full cost-recovery basis through the work it undertakes.

Finally, schedule 6 of the bill includes a number of minor amendments.

These include providing that where a person asks to vary the conditions of registration or listing for a medicine the application for this must be accompanied by the relevant fee to enable the TGA to assess and respond to the request. This will principally support postmarket monitoring of those medicines that are required to have an approved risk management plan as a condition of their registration and where the sponsor may wish to make a change to the agreed plan.

This final schedule of the bill will also clarify what is meant by new information in regard to reviews of decisions made under the act so that it now includes any information that the sponsor had at the time of the original decision but was not provided to that decision maker. This is referred to as initial new information. It will also include any information that the sponsor had at the time the original decision was reconsidered and a new decision was made, but was not provided to the minister or their delegate. Such information is referred to as later new information, reflecting that it relates to the later review of the original decision.

This will ensure that where such information exists the original decision maker or the minister is given the opportunity to review it and make a decision having taken it into account. Currently the later new information can be provided directly to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal as part of a review of a decision made under the act and the tribunal does not need to remit the matter to the original decision maker to give her or him the opportunity to consider it.

The amendments in this schedule will support the minister or their delegate being provided with all pertinent information on which to make a decision and remove a loophole that enables such information to be withheld from that decision maker and lodged later for consideration by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The government intends to make further improvements to the therapeutic goods regulatory regime in the coming year to round out the improvements implemented through legislative amendments this year.

In particular, we intend to introduce further legislation to improve the advertising arrangements for therapeutic goods which are broadly acknowledged to be less than ideal at present.

In conclusion, this bill provides a substantial raft of improvements to the act and the regulation of therapeutic goods in Australia. Together with the wider regulatory reforms implemented already this year, this bill will reinforce Australia’s international position as a leading therapeutic goods regulator. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Dr Stone) adjourned.

**THERAPEUTIC GOODS (CHARGES) AMENDMENT BILL 2009**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Butler.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (11.00 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes consequential amendments to the Therapeutic Goods (Charges) Act 1989 as a result of the Therapeutic Goods
Amendment (2009 Measures No. 3) Bill 2009 which I have just discussed.

This bill allows annual charges to be imposed for the continued inclusion of biologicals in the register. This is consistent with the inclusion of other therapeutic goods in the register.

It also provides that where a medicine or biological is temporarily suspended from the register under the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 it can continue to be taken to be included in the register for the purpose of the Charges Act. This is because the medicine or biological is only temporarily suspended for part of the year and during the suspension the usual regulatory work necessary in relation to the good continues.

A similar provision is already in the Charges Act for medical devices. This amendment just makes consistent the treatment of all therapeutic goods that are suspended.

Debate (on motion by Dr Stone) adjourned.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY BILL 2009
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 24 November, on motion by Mr Martin Ferguson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BIDGOOD (Dawson) (11.01 am)—I rise to speak on the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Bill 2009. This bill proposes to establish the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy, known as ACRE, board. Renewable energy, along with clean coal technology, is an essential part of Australia’s low emissions energy mix and it is important to Australia’s energy security. It plays a strong role in reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions and the Australian government’s support for renewable energy assists industry development, reduces barriers to the national electricity market and provides community access to renewable energy.

The government is serious about renewable energy. This has been clearly demonstrated by the government’s action to increase the renewable energy target, known as RET, to encourage additional generation of electricity from renewable energy sources to a 20 per cent share of renewables in Australia’s electricity supply by 2020. That is up from the previous government’s target of just two per cent. The ACRE board will be a primary source of advice for the government on renewable energy and enabling technology matters.

The board will also play a vital role in assisting ACRE to achieve its objective, which is to promote the development, commercialisation and deployment of renewable energy and enabling technologies and to improve their competitiveness in Australia. The board will help ACRE achieve these objectives by fulfilling its functions, which are set out in this bill. These functions are to provide advice to the minister in relation to renewable energy and enabling technologies, including advice in relation to the following eight key points: point 1, the strategy is to fund and promote the development, commercialisation and use of renewable energy technologies; point 2 is the funding of renewable energy technology projects and measures, including the assessment of these projects and measures, being considered by the board for funding; point 3 is the management of renewable energy technology programs; point 4 is improving the existing program delivery; point 5 is the provision of venture capital funding; point 6 is the priority areas for government support; point 7 is establishing links with state and territory government agencies and the private sector, with a view to developing strategies for stimulating investment in renewable energy technologies; and, finally,
point 8 is any other functions that the minister, by writing, directs the board to perform. These are the eight key points in this bill.

By establishing the ACRE board as a statutory advisory board, the government will ensure that the ACRE board provides independent advice on renewable energy and enabling technologies to the government, renewable energy technologies like biomass cogeneration. And I am pleased to say that in my seat of Dawson Mackay Sugar has had a program on the table now for more than 10 years, and it is only this government that, through its legislation on RETs, has enabled it to go forward into a green light situation—a go situation—with a $110 million project which will not cost the taxpayers of this nation one cent. It will supply one-third of the electricity needs of Mackay, and the plans are for construction of a 36-megawatt renewable biomass cogeneration plant in Mackay. This is all thanks to the certainty given by this government of a 20 per cent renewable energy target. Along with this, the Queensland government has also invested $9 million as a grant to enable research into an ethanol plant to stand alongside the cogeneration biomass plant.

These exciting developments have only been made possible by the political determination of this government to get on with the job and to really be serious about investing in renewable, sustainable, green energy development. This project will generate 270 construction jobs directly and the plant alone, as I said, will power 33 per cent of Mackay city’s power requirements. Environmentally, emissions will be reduced by a staggering 200,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, you did hear that correctly, I said 200,000 tonnes per year. It is all due to the fact that this government got on with the job of legislating on the renewable energy target. Remember, these plans have been on the table for over 10 years because the previous government did not have the political determination to get on and get real with the job of reducing carbon emissions. They did not have the political will. This government has and we are now enabling exciting projects like this.

This project is carbon neutral. That is so exciting. Every year the green gold of sugarcane grows and from that we can produce one third of the needs for electricity for the people of Mackay. The exciting thing about this project, because all the engineering and science has been done and it has just been waiting for the political determination to give it the green light to go ahead, is that it can be duplicated right up the coast of North Queensland. In the long term the industry projects that in Far North Queensland cogeneration will supply up to 70 per cent of households by 2016. It is truly revolutionary that something which has been growing for hundreds of years, sugarcane, will suddenly be utilised to provide the electricity needs of 70 per cent of households by 2016. All it needed was the political determination to get on with the job of reducing carbon emissions.

Up in the north of my seat, in the Burdekin, Herbert and Townsville areas, by 2016 they are talking about supplying greater capacity than required for household consumption. That truly is an exciting prospect. The industry is even looking at supplying about 80 per cent of the estimated households around the Whitsunday and hinterland area of Mackay. It is truly amazing, with the political determination to get the job done.

Establishing the ACRE board in statute also gives it a very significant degree of protection. Its structures, attributes and functions can only be amended or abolished by an act of parliament. The ACRE board will also have a high degree of accountability as it will have to report annually to the Minister.
for Resources and Energy. Establishing the
CEO in this legislation will give ACRE a
clear leadership team and further establish
ACRE as a separate brand.

As I said at the start, this Rudd Labor
government truly believes that renewable
ergy and clean coal technologies are essen-
tial parts of Australia’s low emissions energy
mix. This is important to Australia’s energy
security.

Unlike the coalition, we will never sup-
port a nuclear future for Australia. I will
never stand for nuclear power plants in Mac-
kay, the Whitsundays, Bowen, Burdekin or
Townsville. I will not stand and see a nuclear
plant put on the Great Barrier Reef and nei-
ther will the people of Dawson. The candi-
date standing against me, a candidate of the
National Party, who is on Mackay Regional
Council, believes in the words of Senator
Barnaby Joyce that every council around the
nation should have a vote on whether they
want a nuclear power plant in their backyard.
I call upon that councillor who is going to be
standing against me at the next election to
come out and say they will not allow a nu-
clear power plant at Mackay, the Whitsun-
days, the Great Barrier Reef, Bowen, Ayr or
South Townsville. It will not happen on my
watch and God forbid that anyone else would
allow it to happen. We are not going to go
down the nuclear road.

If you go down the nuclear road you will
destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs that
are related to the mining industry in this na-
tion. If you go down the nuclear road you
will set an example, as one of the world’s
greatest coal exporters, that you have put the
white flag up. We do not surrender on the
coal industry. I am here as the miners’
friend—always have been, always will be.
This Rudd Labor government will stand by
the mining industry. We will protect the in-
dustry, we will protect the jobs and we will
expand our exports and our productivity, and
we will add to the bottom line of this nation,
which those opposite failed to do.

By going down the nuclear road, you will
destroy the Australian coal industry. Look at
the example of the United Kingdom, with
only four working pits left. Look at the ex-
ample of France, where 80 per cent of its
energy requirements are supplied by nuclear
power and there is no mining industry. That
is the road you on the other side of this
House will take us down. We will not go
down the nuclear road. We will not surrender
the coalmining industry. We will stand by the
miners and we will stand by those communi-
ties which faithfully add to the bottom line of
this nation.

It is this government which has provided
for aged-care pensions against the backdrop
of the worst recession in 75 years. You on the
other side of the House failed to deliver $65
a fortnight to single aged people in our
community when you had the riches of the
minerals boom. You failed; we have suc-
cceeded. We are a party of the future; you are
a party who are divided. You are in disunity
and you will never lead. You do not have the
interests of this nation’s future at heart. You
are not acting in the national interest; this
government is.

I commend this bill to the House because
it will invest in future renewable, sustain-
able, green, clean coal technologies. This is
the way to go, not the nuclear road. You will
destroy the coalmining industry; we will
save it by investments and by bills such as
this. I totally, wholeheartedly, passionately
commend this bill to the House.
Mr HUNT (Flinders) (11.15 am)—Let me begin by apologising for giving the member for Dawson a platform to run on: a campaign against the new uranium mine which Peter Garrett recently approved. I believe it is a great example of cognitive dissonance, and I will explain that term to him afterwards, but I apologise for giving him a platform to take flight of fancy.

I want to make three statements in relation to the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Bill 2009. This bill does something which we think is reasonable, fair and appropriate. It builds on that which we put in place in government, but it comes in the context of a government which has waged an effective assault on renewable energy. The government has waged that assault in three ways: firstly, by seeking to delay, defer and deny the renewable energy target by making it hostage to legislation at the time which would have prevented it from being passed and would have prevented the early implementation of the renewable energy target. We stood for and promoted the 20 per cent renewable energy target for Australia by 2020. We stood by the notion of expanding the great opportunities for the visionary energy sources of the future—whether it is biogas, Mr Deputy Speaker Schultz, in your own electorate through the use of landfill at the Tarago plant; whether it is wind or solar or geothermal or hydro or wave or tidal. These are all energy sources of the future. They will not provide all of Australia’s energy, but they will be a critical part of the transition to a clean energy future along with clean coal—whether it is through sequestration or algal work—gas or other forms of clean energy as we proceed forward.

But we do know this: we clearly offered to pass legislation associated with the renewable energy target. We offered to bring it forward and deal with it, but the government sought to politicise it and make it hostage to other legislation. So we fought for a deal which would have separated that legislation, we fought for a deal which would ensure that our heavy extracting industries would not pay a disproportionate cost and we fought for a deal which would ensure that we cleaned up and used the waste coalmine gas which would otherwise have been vented as methane or flared as CO₂—and we were successful in all of those three great tasks. We were thereby able to achieve a renewable energy target of 20 per cent, or 60,000 gigawatt hours of Australia’s potential 300,000 gigawatt hours of energy, by 2020. It is a good thing and a positive thing, but it stands squarely in the face of a government who on the one hand talked about renewables but on the other did everything they could to see us knock down or block their legislation. But we would not accept that; we held them to account. We argued the moral case and the practical case. We won in the eyes of the public; we won over the public imagination. They accepted our proposals and our vision and therefore the government backed down, buckled and agreed to what we said. That was a good result.

The second area in which this legislation before us is undermined is in relation to the government’s activity on decentralised solar programs. We have seen an attack on solar energy on three different fronts. Firstly, with the solar homes program, the government all of a sudden, overnight, caused chaos in the industry a year ago when on budget night 2008 they means tested the program in direct defiance of an express, clear and absolute election promise. This was a breach of a promise. It was a breach of that which was solemnly taken to the Australian people. In-
instead of dealing with the program in a different way, what we saw was an express, clear, absolute breach of promise. We then saw the entire solar homes program abolished in June this year—unilaterally—with no notice whatsoever. That same day the program was terminated. Again there was chaos. We had solar operators calling our offices. We had build-ups of solar equipment which was left to fester as overdone inventories. These were real problems created by the government and experienced by solar operators—people whose jobs were put on the line, who had relied upon the good faith of the government, whose hopes were dashed and who suffered financially. It was everything but the successful, sensible management of a program.

We have also seen under the solar programs that the remote solar program for assisting Indigenous communities was itself also abolished with no notice. An email was issued at 8.33 one morning in late June. That email was effective as of 8.30 am that same day. Solar programs were ceased for remote Indigenous communities as of that moment. For some businesses this was catastrophic. It went to the heart of their business model, their mission and their purpose. I have dealt with Bushlight from Alice Springs. It has been seriously affected. This was a not-for-profit project and a not-for-profit organisation with an aim to provide clean, reliable solar energy to remote Indigenous and other communities—and the program was stopped dead at that moment. It was an act of incompetence and an act of effective malice against people in Indigenous and other remote communities.

The third of the solar programs which was affected was the Solar Schools Program. Again, it was stopped dead in its tracks overnight just a couple of months ago. We have seen the solar homes program abolished, the remote solar program abolished and the Solar Schools Program abolished. Why? Because they were all deemed to be too successful. We have been in the process of spending billions and billions, through the emissions trading scheme, whilst axing practical solar programs which actually make a difference on the ground in terms of emissions reduction and energy consumption. That is the dissonance within the government’s approach.

That brings me to one of the programs directly under the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy, and that is the Solar Flagships Program. The Solar Flagships Program was a hoax, a fraud, a fix and a set-up. It is in chaos. Let me put it this way: there was an express promise made by the Prime Minister that he would create a 1,000-megawatt power station for $1.6 billion. Yet we know that that project is likely to cost not $1.6 billion but $4.8 billion. It has now been scaled back to less than 40 per cent of its size. It is likely to be still lesser in size. That is a clear broken promise, a clear failure of administration and a clear inability to manage public funds for proper benefit.

We have seen a failure of solar programs, firstly through the renewable energy target and the way in which the government prevented its own program; secondly, through the abolition of the solar homes, remote solar and solar schools programs; and, thirdly, through the catastrophic mismanagement of the Solar Flagships Program. There is a pattern here of promising the earth and delivering a vastly different outcome. Each of these programs stands for that principle. We know that the government was warned about the design elements of the renewable energy target. The government was warned of the problems. We were not going to stand in its way, but the government was warned and that is now in chaos. Renewable energy is in chaos. The solar homes, solar schools and remote solar programs are in chaos and now so is solar flagships.
Let me make this point: what was a well-managed program prior to the transition of governments has now become chaotic. That is why there is in fact a need for a Centre for Renewable Energy, which may bring some semblance of order to the way in which the government manages its renewable energy programs. It is desperately needed. Each of these three programs, the renewable energy target, solar programs in general and Solar Flagships Program in particular, is in chaos. This bill is needed to add a semblance of order, a semblance of structure, a semblance of progress to what is otherwise a good idea of clean energy for Australia—solar energy for Australia; wave, geothermal, tidal and landfill biogas for Australia. That is the vision we believe in. That is what we were delivering. I hope that this bill will enable some progress and will allow the government to resolve that which it has undone and that which it has allowed to be brought into chaos.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (11.25 am)—We heard a lot from the previous speaker about cognitive dissonance—that is, two competing beliefs. While the now opposition were in government, although they said that they had a belief in supporting solar energy, that belief was never actioned or delivered on the ground. We have seen this government deliver more solar panels on schools, on community centres and on houses than were ever delivered by the previous government.

But I rise to speak on the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Bill 2009. This is a very important bill because it is designed to assist the development of renewable energy industry in Australia. It provides a strong indication that we are in the process of adapting to and harnessing the harsh Australian conditions. For decades we have heard many times in this House and in Australian literature what a sunburnt country we are. We are one of the hottest and driest continents on earth. So we really need to look at how we can harness our natural environment to help us adapt to these harsh Australian conditions.

Recently this House passed the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme—which cannot be said for the other chamber—outlining the framework for Australia’s low-carbon future. What we need to realise is that, if we make the right choices and investment now, the extreme Australian conditions could become one of our greatest assets as we move forward into a new era of carbon consciousness and accountability. As the government sets in place the framework for Australia’s low-carbon future, it is promising to see that life is beginning to be injected into the renewable energy industry in this country. Over the last two years this government has been doing significant amounts of work in delivering in these areas. Obviously one of our biggest movements has been to increase the renewable energy target, which I know—and the member for Franklin has often told me—has unleashed billions of dollars of investment into the renewable energy area.

The Australian Centre for Renewable Energy board set up under this bill will play a significant role in helping Australia harness its renewable energy potential for commercial consumption. The bill outlines the establishment of the board and the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy. It outlines the functions, constitution and membership of the board, as well as other formalities such as voting and annual reporting. The main function of the board will be to provide advice to the minister on renewable energy technologies, including strategies to fund and promote the development, commercialisation and use of renewable energy technologies in Australia.
I would like to use this opportunity to illustrate the importance of the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy by talking about geothermal energy as one source of renewable energy that has immense potential here in Australia. As we know, the surface temperature of our continent can get very hot. But deep under our feet there are also very high temperatures. Geothermal power offers the potential for electricity to be produced from the circulation of water in closed circuits through deep wells drilled into the earth’s crust.

The great value of geothermal technology is that it offers vast amounts of baseload power 24 hours a day every day of the year. Once we get the technology right it will undoubtedly form a significant part of Australia’s baseload energy mix in the future. For example, the Australian Geothermal Energy Association predicts that geothermal technology could provide up to 2,200 megawatts of baseload capacity by 2020, representing about five per cent of Australia’s current generating capacity. As a South Australian member I find it very pleasing to see that South Australia is taking the lead in the development of this very important energy source, with the Cooper Basin being the current centre of activity in this sector in Australia. It is promising to see the development of Geodynamics Ltd, which recently drilled a well of more than 4,000 metres into the hot fractured rock at the site in the Cooper Basin. They have just completed construction of a one-megawatt power station which will be commissioned in 2010 to provide power to the nearby town of Innamincka. This town is in the far north-eastern corner of South Australia and currently gets its electricity from diesel generators. This is a really exciting possibility that I am very pleased to see taking place.

If all goes to plan, this proof-of-concept project will be scaled up to a 50-megawatt plant which will be capable of providing electricity to 50,000 households. The company is in the process of conducting feasibility studies into transmitting the energy from the Cooper Basin to major load centres in Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney. The importance of this project in north-eastern South Australia is that its success as the first commercial geothermal power station in Australia will encourage much needed private investment in the geothermal industry. It will also bring the potential of geothermal power into the public domain. These are two major challenges facing the industry, as outlined by the Geothermal Industry Development Framework released in August 2008.

In light of these and other challenges, much work needs to be done before we can effectively harness the geothermal energy potential of this country. These challenges are not unique to geothermal energy; they also stand in the way of the development of other sources of renewable energy. It is to overcome these challenges through strategic planning and advice on government support for emerging industries that we need the board of the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy. It is a sign of our times that a remote town like Innamincka will next year shift from one of the most polluting and inefficient means of energy generation to one of the cleanest known to exist. It will use some of the most advanced technology in this field in the world. Through the experience of this town, we are about to find out that geothermal energy is not a distant pipedream but a tangible source of energy lying beneath our feet.

With, hopefully, the passage of the CPRS, and when dealing with the issue of climate change, it is important that Australia moves towards a low carbon future. Doing so will require creative thinking, entrepreneurship and targeted government support. The establishment of the Australian Centre for Renew-
able Energy will facilitate this process and ensure that Australia capitalises both on its natural wealth as a continent of extremes and on the global leadership we have already shown in renewable energy technology. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (11.33 am)—I am very pleased to be able to speak on the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Bill 2009 and would like to put on the record that on 29 September 2005 I put out a press release in which I made the call for a renewable, sustainable energy authority to be set up to do what this legislation is in fact going to do. My call at that stage was based on a study tour that I had recently made in the United States, looking at biofuels and other sustainable energies. I could see what was happening there with the sustainable energy centre that had been set up and the work on sustainable and renewable energy sources that was being done at a policy level and a practical level.

I was interested in the contribution of the previous speaker, the member for Kingston, because I am very interested in geothermal energy. I undertook a more recent study tour in Europe to look at climate change and a range of renewable energy sources, visiting the Carbon Capture and Storage Association in London, as well as the processing of daily waste in Copenhagen, where garbage trucks go out, as they do in Australia, at about six o’clock in the morning and pick up the garbage, come back to a massive incinerator with massive ‘kettles’, use that waste to provide the energy to boil the kettles and out of that produce steam to provide energy for about half a million people and, during the wintertime, provide energy for hot water for central heating. So an enormous number of things are being done globally, some of which I will talk about today. Obviously, the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy will embrace such things as recycling as well.

The comment that I would make at the start, though, is that it is all very well to set these things up, and to look at the functions of the centre and the role of the minister and the board, but you really have to have a government that wants to do something about it. I can remember when I came here in 2001 and I was interested, as I still am, in biofuels. There was a debate going on at that time about setting mandatory renewable energy targets on a number of levels. The one that I was particularly interested in was in relation to biofuels—ethanol, biodiesels and others—and the then Howard government put in place the target for, from memory, 360,000 million litres of biofuels to be achieved by 2010. There are less biofuels produced now, certainly as at six months ago, than there were when the target was set—and it was at a very low level. The point I am making is that it is all very well to make these political utterances that we are moving down a certain pathway, ‘We intend to do this; this is the policy,’ but you really need the will of government to drive these things.

Even though the main debate in this place in the last 12 months has been about a market mechanism, an emissions trading scheme to be used to impact on heavy emitters, a lot of the solutions lie in other areas that do not necessarily need a market mechanism to drive the agenda. The Europeans are moving towards some sort of emissions trading arrangement as part of their response to greenhouse gas emissions, but it is not being seen as the only game in town. I would say to the government that, even though the policy and public utterances seem quite positive on the surface, there are some cracks appearing in the armour because of mixed messages. Some people would be well aware of the mixed messages that were sent in terms of solar energy, for instance. The rules seem to be constantly changing as to who can and cannot access some of the incentive pack-
ages, whether it should be income assessed et cetera—those sorts of issues. How serious are we about driving sustainable energy sources, solar and wind, and promoting geothermal, for instance? Look at our poor old South Australian geothermal producer, stuck out in the middle of nowhere: as a society we have given him $5 million through the taxpayer to assist him and he is bumbling around out there having difficulties with the drilling and other processes. If we are serious about geothermal there should be a massive focus on trying to drive those processes.

On my study tour I visited two geothermal plants. One is a massive geothermal plant at a little place called Laradello in Italy, at the northern end of Tuscany. They have been producing geothermal power for nearly 100 years at that site. There are two massive power stations there, all computer driven—not a person in the building—and obviously having a significant impact on the local power generation area and in terms of Italy’s total needs. In other parts of the world they are doing similar things. In Australia, we have left this fellow out in the middle of South Australia and we hope he comes in with the goods. We should be out there helping him. Some people debate whether geothermal is sustainable and renewable, but it is a natural source of energy that we could be using.

The other geothermal plant that I went to, in Germany, is the coldest geothermal plant in the world. They drilled down about 3.8 kilometres to hot rocks and found that the rocks were not as hot as they thought they would be. But, rather than give up, the Germans—and they have done this at a number of relatively small plants—are interested in the science, how it is going to evolve and just what they can do with low-heat hot rocks and hot hot rocks and the variations in temperatures between the rocks and the water that is there as well. This particular plant, at Neustadt-Glewe, is producing electricity from steam from water that has not boiled. It sounds as though I have been in a pub all night, making a suggestion like that. But they are producing electricity through a normal generating process driven by steam from hot rocks that have generated that steam at 98 degrees Celsius. At the plant I talked about in Italy, the heat of the steam coming out of the ground is over 200 degrees Celsius. The Minister for Resources and Energy may be interested in this. How do they achieve the creation of steam from water that has not boiled? They have developed various brine solutions that they add to that water to create the same impact as boiling water, hence able to drive the turbines that create the electricity. They had a whole range of technical details as well but, rather than give up, they accepted a challenge. So there we have the coldest geothermal plant in the world producing electricity from water that has not boiled. It is quite incredible.

There are others areas I think the centre should be looking at—as I said earlier, I congratulate the government for initiating this process—and one is solar energy. Over the years we have nearly hunted every solar scientist off this part of the world, yet we keep being told it is one of the hottest parts of the globe. Where is the research that we should have been doing? Why have we sent our top people overseas? And why have a lot of our wind people, both technical and scientific, gone to other nations? Failures in government policy, that is why. Nothing else. Failures in government policy: words, rhetoric, but no real action. I see in the creation of this centre a positive move forward where these people can be assisted. If we are serious about global warming and coming to grips with climate change, we cannot leave it all up to some sort of market mechanism. There are a whole range of reasons why that in itself will fail. We have got to embrace
other solutions. We have got to embrace, as this bill does, a whole range of renewable energy sources if we are serious about driving the change.

The Minister for Resources and Energy, who is at the table, would be aware—I sincerely hope he would be aware—of activities that are happening as we speak in Lake Cargelligo. It is not in my electorate but nonetheless it is something that we should be paying attention to. Electricity there will be generated from solar sources—from mirrors scattered in a strategic pattern around the frame of a Comet windmill. I have not actually been there and seen it, but I am told the top of the windmill has a graphite block that is superheated, with water pipes going through it et cetera, and graphite, which is pure carbon, has the capacity to hold heat for extended periods of time. That plan, I am told, will provide electricity for 3,000 people. Some would say, ‘That’s not going to save the globe,’ and probably not, but it could save a lot of money by removing the need to upgrade the transmission lines out to a small place like Lake Cargelligo. It could be used in a number of other areas too, not only in terms of the generation of electricity—in that case as a backup when transmission fails, as it does from time to time—but in terms of the capacity to store heat in these graphite blocks. Some people might say that is a bit too much like science fiction at the moment, but let us come to grips with it and make it happen, rather than leaving it all to the bankers and the traders in a market mechanism.

As you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, in Copenhagen 20 per cent of electricity comes from wind. Obviously, those countries are plugged into a European grid where there are all sorts of entry points for nuclear energy, coal et cetera in relation to power generation. I see the minister is shaking his head down there, thinking, ‘Here goes this bloke on wind again.’ I do not like to verbal you, Minister Ferguson, but your body language was not terribly positive. I am not suggesting that wind is the total solution, but the way in which government policy has been going in recent years, your government included, would suggest that the only solution is coal. If you are serious about this centre, you should start to get serious about the advice that may come from people who are actually working on some of these renewable energy sources. We cannot just write them off saying, ‘They’ll only contribute two per cent, four per cent or six per cent; they will not solve the problem.’ Most great walls were built starting with one brick. They were not built in one hit.

If the government are serious about this, they should look at what their own bill addresses. It is pointless setting up these things if the ministers who are responsible for accepting the messages do not take any notice of the advice. That is what happened under the Howard regime. They kept getting advice on various things that could be done and should be done but did very little. Before you came in, Minister Ferguson, I mentioned that the Howard government in 2001 set up the mandatory renewable energy target for biofuels, to be reached by 2010, but by the time they left government we had fewer biofuels than when they set the target. I think there is a message in that: if we are serious about these things, we have really got to start to drive them at the policy level, not send some of the mixed messages that have been coming out of this place in the last 12 months.

The biofuels example is an interesting one. While I was on that tour in Europe, I met with some Scottish scientists who are working on the breakdown of the cell wall of barley and wheat stubble. In terms of their agricultural activities there, because of the short season, after the barley or wheat harvest they bale up the straw, essentially to get
it off the ground so that they can get it prepared for the next crop. Some of that goes into litter for pigs and whatever else; its food value is quite limited. These Scottish scientists—and scientists in other parts of the world; I met with people in Copenhagen who are doing similar things in terms of biosolutions, and Canada and the US are working very hard on this as well—are trying to break down the strength of the cell wall in wheat stubble, in this case, as well as barley stubble, so that it can be used to make a viable third-generation biofuel, through a lignocellulosic process, for the future. In that sense, in a low-carbon world they are making a positive contribution in terms of biofuels and value-adding to agriculture. But this country is doing nothing on that. We are told we have got to value-add, we are told we have to move into more renewable sources of energy, but very little is happening.

I am not a climate change sceptic. I believe the nation should be doing something to come to grips with climate change, and playing a leading role in this area. I have issues with the Prime Minister’s current proposal, but I support his going to Copenhagen and playing some sort of leading role. While I was in Copenhagen on my tour, I met with some economists who worked for the IPCC a bit further away, in Paris, at the International Energy Agency. They were very sceptical about what was going to come out of the Copenhagen climate change conference. This was three or four months ago, but 10,000 beds were cancelled while I was there. So I do not think a lot will come out of the Copenhagen conference. That is also partly because we are trying to crack the nut with a market mechanism, and there is a lot of scepticism about using a market mechanism to do that.

There is another issue that comes into it, though. I was very pleased with the announcement last week that the government was going to exempt agriculture from the emissions trading scheme, because, Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, as you would remember, I said in the parliament that I would not support a carbon pollution reduction scheme that included food. That is not just for domestic reasons. Obviously, the domestic issues are about the cost impost on our farming community and the measurability of some of the emissions et cetera. But the major reason I raised that argument was that, if you extend a global carbon emissions arrangement to the food sector, the potential impact on land use is enormous. In fact, the government’s CPRS incentivises the planting of trees for carbon purposes. Presumably that would be on land that was previously used for food purposes.

As a farmer, I think that one of the best things that could happen is that we create another competitor for land use. The first thing I would be doing is moving into third-generation biofuels, which tick the positive carbon boxes—renewable energy boxes—rather than the negative boxes that food ticks if you start to embrace food in a carbon economy. The starch in wheat is carbon—carbon footprints, nitrous oxide. In this country, we punch enormous amounts of nitrogen into the soil to achieve not just yield but, especially, a premium price because of the protein in the grain. Lignocellulosic biofuels do not tick any of those negative boxes. The issue of food in a carbon economy is much more than a case of localised farmers reacting to a particular cost impost. If you were to impose the CPRS on the world, the shift of land use into renewable fuels—or into carbon by way of vegetation et cetera—and the movement away from the food economy would create enormous political instability from those people who are not being fed. That is something we should all consider.

(Time expired)
Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (11.54 am)—The Treasurer and the Minister for Resources and Energy launched the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy just one month ago, on 28 October 2009. This was indeed a very big day for Australia and for our shared future. The Centre for Renewable Energy is part of the Rudd government’s $4.5 billion Clean Energy Initiative. Its purpose is to facilitate investment in clean energy alternatives to the point of commercialisation. It consolidates several progressive programs that this government has already invested in separately and creates a one-stop shop for those with a view to investing in the nation’s future energy supply. Programs consolidated within the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy are the $300 million Renewable Energy Demonstration Program; the $15 million Second Generation Biofuels Research and Development Program; the $50 million Geothermal Drilling Program, which is a very big initiative in my home state of South Australia; the $20 million Advanced Electricity Storage Technologies Program; the $14 million Wind Energy Forecasting Capability Program; the $18 million Renewable Energy Equity Fund; and the $150 million for new initiatives including funding from the formerly proposed Clean Energy Program.

The purpose of the Bill currently before us is to create the Australian Renewable Energy Centre board, establish its functions and processes, and create the position of its chief executive officer. This is pretty simple and pretty straightforward stuff but the public should be aware of the significance of this bill. It may be pretty simple and straightforward but it is a bill of significant importance. The substantial step forward that this parliament is making on behalf of the nation is in creating such a centre, because the options are extremely stark and of the deepest, most widespread and all-pervading consequence.

Reduced to its simplest terms the fact is that anthropogenic greenhouse gases are affecting our climate. Some in the opposition say, ‘No, they’re not,’ but beyond that the debate quickly becomes bizarre and unproductive; a point that I will touch on directly. We all know of the posturing that has been going on in this place over the last year.

In short, there are those who are prepared to act on the global scientific consensus regarding our atmosphere and how it affects us—and there are those who are not. Those who are not prepared to accept the overwhelming scientific consensus that anthropogenic greenhouse gases are affecting our climate are a mixed bag of industries, industrialists and their lobbyists, publicity seekers, political adventurers, fearful conservatives, conspiracy theorists and so on. There are many conspiracy theorists out there. Then there are those who are just plain silly. For example, one senator the other day said that he likes carbon; he said, ‘We eat it, so we should want more in our atmosphere, not less.’ He also said, ‘Plants need carbon dioxide so we should give them more for their health. The more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere the better.’ Clearly, he is a senator who likes a little science—but only a little bit of science. Another senator just a day ago informed us that all the scientists have got it wrong: ‘The world isn’t warming, it’s cooling.’ Another senator who presumably wants more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere not less.

Some are saying that an international agreement on greenhouse gases will subvert our constitution, overthrow our governments, dash our nation state status, and make us all, including Australian parliaments, subservient to and run by faceless European bureaucrats. These are some of the outrageous things that we have been hearing. The highest level of the alternative government of this country has declared that the nerds of the world have
taken over and that scientists are now radical left wing revolutionaries on the verge of overthrowing global capitalism. How alarmist! Less dangerous individuals say that we might expect to experience increased climate variability, but that people radically increasing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere surely cannot have anything to do with it. One scientist employed to confuse the community’s climate change education got on TV and said something along the lines of: ‘It would be nice to grow wine grapes in northern England, so if there is global warming it will be a good thing. Who doesn’t like wine grapes?’ Who indeed.

Finding a consistent argument, a stable position amongst those who are resisting actions, including those relevant to the bill we are debating here today, is a pretty difficult and terribly tiring task. The opponents of action, the types of action that this bill is designed to facilitate, have come out with the biggest load of disparate, puerile rubbish that I have ever encountered. But I am glad that the Australian public saw through all the flak and voted at the last election for the policy of taking science seriously, taking the observable facts seriously, and of course taking action in response to those facts seriously, changing our world and what we do to this world into the future, extremely seriously. The Australian people voted for a policy of combating climate change. Some members of the Australian parliament should get over their loss and acknowledge the fact and act in accordance with the public’s wishes.

This I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition has done, to his credit. As he said this morning, how can any 21st century party not have a position on climate change? This was the Leader of the Opposition. What we are working towards is of course the minimisation of harm to the environment in which we live and on which we rely. Beyond the global science, beyond gaining a position on some sort of equilibrium within our environment, we are actually looking at an astronomical shift in technology, a shift that will mark a new period in human existence.

Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, the uptake of new technologies and new sources of power will replace to an extent over time some sources of power that have been around since pre-Victorian times, using new methods instead of those that marked the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution hundreds of years ago. This is the era that we are approaching. We have had radical changes in communication technologies, almost inconceivable changes, within the period of our lifetime. We have had radical changes in medicine and improvements in our understanding of the makeup and sustenance of life within one lifetime. But people seem intent on us relying on the humble, old systems to power our mega-cities, our hospitals, laboratories and operating theatres, our global digital communications networks and our homes.

Human inventiveness is so much more than this. The assistance delivered by this government and this minister and coordinated by the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy open up energy options of enormous potential for this country. A vast variety might be explored and some developed up to commercial scale. We have scientists developing algae for the extraction of oil for biofuel at the South Australian Research and Development Institute located at West Beach, right in the middle of the electorate of Hindmarsh. A little over a week ago they officially opened their bioreactor, a plant to grow the algae they have painstakingly selected from thousands of alternatives for its high oil content. The bioreactor will help them develop their technology to the point of the construction of a demonstration plant in Adelaide’s western region in my electorate. This is one area in which people are work-
ing, inventing and creating—using, in this case, little more than seawater and sunlight over unproductive land for the sustainable production of oil for fuel.

The benefits of projects such as this to my electorate, to South Australia and to Australia as a nation and beyond are potentially enormous. Natural resources such as our ocean and sunlight; our interior, which contains huge hot rock resources; our latitude; and our exposure to wind and currents are the things with which we are blessed, things that offer us so much potential in this area. I want to commend the people exploring these options and doing the research and the pilot projects—the scientists, the engineers, the start-ups, the investors—who collectively paint a picture of a dynamic and exciting future for all of us now and into the next period of human development. I commend the bill, its purpose and objects, to the House.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (12.04 pm)—I am very pleased to make a contribution to this very important piece of legislation, the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Bill 2009, which heralds so much of what is very, very important to Australia’s future, particularly in terms of renewable energy. As you are well aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, I come from the renewable energy capital not just of Australia but of this whole region. Indeed, it should be on the cutting edge of the renewable energy business and systems throughout the world. I want to congratulate the minister at the table at the moment, the Hon. Martin Ferguson, for his work particularly in resources and energy and in the support of the renewable energy sector, which is so important both to Tasmania and to the rest of Australia.

The bill itself is to establish the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy board and the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy. Just in brief, the bill provides for the establishment and functions of the board, its constitution and membership and requirements for meetings, voting and annual reporting. The bill also establishes the position of CEO of ACRE, which is to be held by a senior executive service officer of the department.

As part of the Renewable Energy Demonstration Program, the minister at the table only recently announced one of the first projects to be successful. This indeed affects my electorate of Braddon and in particular King Island. The successful applicant for the Renewable Energy Demonstration Program project was Hydro Tasmania. It proposed a series of innovative projects on King and Flinders islands in the Bass Strait. But in the main, this is affecting King Island, and will result in the use of renewable energy for over 50 per cent of the island’s energy needs and will reduce CO2 emissions by more than 70 per cent. As a system, this scale would be world leading so, again, hydroelectricity is at the cutting edge in Tasmania in terms of renewable energy for Australia. This integrated project on King Island should be part of cutting-edge technology to assist not just in Australia but also worldwide.

Just for a bit of background information, the Bass Strait islands include King Island, which is in Braddon, and Flinders Island, which is in Bass. The electricity supply on these islands is the responsibility of Hydro Tasmania and is generated principally using diesel and wind generation sources. The average annual generation is around 20 gigawatt hours, comprising 72.5 per cent diesel, 27 per cent wind and 0.5 per cent solar. There are approximately 1,300 electricity customers on King Island and 720 on Flinders Island. On King Island the majority of the load, 65 per cent, is business related, with two large customers accounting for half the business load. On Flinders Island the major-
ity of the load, some 58 per cent, is for residential purposes.

Both King Island and Flinders Island remain unconnected to the national power network. Power has traditionally been supplied by burning diesel fuel, a costly and emissions intensive practice exposed to volatile fuel prices and to energy security concerns. The basic argument is that the cost of power production exceeds what can be reasonably charged for supply and the additional cost burden of something like $6 million per annum is borne by the Tasmanian taxpayer. A solution is required to significantly reduce the amount of fossil fuel required for the power supply. This is at the heart of the Renewable Energy Demonstration Program project which the Minister for Resources and Energy, who is at the table, announced just recently. I do thank the minister for that very much, and I know the people of King Island are really looking forward to seeing what happens here.

More broadly, there is also a perception in the wider Australian community that renewable energy technologies are generally unsuitable to supply base load generation or to meet high priority demands and loads. There is little question that the integration of intermittent renewable energy sources to the power system represents a significant challenge in the large-scale development of renewable generation. The BSI project aims to demonstrate that technologies exist today to manage this intermittency, and that a pathway exists to implement these technologies in a cost-effective manner in the medium term.

To date—and this was at the heart of the success of Hydro Tasmania’s application for the REDP funding—Hydro Tasmania has achieved some promising results with the increased utilisation of renewable energy in the Bass Strait. In particular on King Island, Hydro Tasmania has successfully reduced fuel use by 35 per cent largely via the use of wind turbines. Currently the system can be operated with wind power supplying up to 70 per cent of instantaneous customer demand.

The Bass Strait Islands Renewable Energy Integration Project successful in the funding application is a portfolio of innovative projects utilising new and existing technologies to increase the use of renewable energy in a power system, reducing emissions and improving the quality of supply. The project will demonstrate the potential for renewable energy to contribute significantly to the development of a more sustainable and lower carbon intensive Australian power system over the next 10-20 years—the very heart of the CPRS system that we wish to see this parliament pass this week. The project includes the development of wind and solar photovoltaic in combination with new energy storage devices and enabling technologies designed to allow greater contribution of power from renewable sources. The rollout of a smart grid will also enhance the ability to control load to match the available renewable energy supplies.

The total cost of the program is estimated at $61.2 million over four years. Hydro Tasmania requested something like $19 million from the federal government and was successful in receiving $15 million. I know they are highly excited by their success in that area.

In conclusion, because I know the minister would like to see this bill on its way, as it should be, and we have other legislation to get on with, may I congratulate the government on its renewable energy initiatives. May I congratulate it on its CPRS legislation, which hopefully will be passed today. I thank the minister for the availability of the scheme and the funding. I look forward to working with him, Hydro Tasmania and the
Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (12.13 pm)—in reply—I express my appreciation to all members who have participated in what is a very constructive debate. In the mind of the government we would like to see it not only pass in the House of Representatives today but also hopefully pass in the Senate this week. It is in that context that I express our appreciation to the opposition for its support for the bill and for our endeavours to actually have it treated in a non-controversial way in the Senate over the next day and a half.

I would like to briefly touch on the contributions of members who have participated in the debate on the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy Bill 2009. Firstly, I go to the contribution by the member for Kalgoorlie. I simply say that from the government’s point of view we believe that there are abundant sources of energy and hence Australia does not need to pursue nuclear energy. But I also acknowledge as the minister for energy that other countries are not as fortunate as us from an energy security point of view, and hence nuclear energy is very much part of their energy mix. More importantly, we are central to the development of nuclear energy in many countries beyond Australia because we are a reliable supplier of uranium, and potentially there is going to be a substantial expansion in our capacity in the foreseeable future.

I now go to your contribution, Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, where you correctly identify the range of renewable options that the government is pursuing as part of an integrated clean energy strategy. The intention of ACRE is to support the renewable energy industry, and in doing so bring down the cost of technology in years to come so as to ensure its wider deployment. That is potentially very much assisted by a renewable energy target which guarantees that, by 2020, 20 per cent of Australia’s energy will come from renewable sources.

I also note the participation of the member for Kennedy, who has a very strong interest in these matters. I was fortunate enough to participate with the Treasurer in an energy symposium held in Parliament House recently about the potential development of renewable energy and other energy options in Far North Queensland. That is a work in progress for the member for Kennedy and for the government. The member for Dawson made a thoughtful and constructive contribution to the debate with particular reference to biomass, which is of significance in his electorate and surrounding areas.

This brings me to the ill thought out contribution by the member for Flinders and his attack on the government’s renewable energy policies. I simply say to the member for Flinders, a simple comparison of what we have put in place over the last two years compared to the opposition’s contribution over the previous 12 years is an interesting exercise. The debate currently before the Senate concerning the introduction of a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, putting a price on carbon, provides a very stark contrast between the decisive action of this government—with potential support for the renewable energy sector—and action by the previous government in which the member for Flinders served as a member of the executive. He raised issues such as the question of being honest about the Solar Flagships program and our broader clean energy strategy. I simply say about the member for Flinders, generally, that he has form in making statements designed to get a headline. However, he needs to begin to recognise that in government it is not possible to promise eve-
rything to everyone. It is about time he un-
derstood that integrity and honesty in gov-
ernment is part of good policy development
and establishing one’s standing in broader
policy debates.

The comments of the member for Flinders
regarding the Solar Flagships program are
ill-informed and offensive to my departmen-
tal officers who have been working on the
development of the program. The Solar Flag-
ships program will deliver significant solar
deployment on a large scale in Australia,
over two rounds not one round, and so hope-
fully enable more mature and developing
technologies to be deployed in Australia.
That is what the clean energy strategy is
about—not picking winners but supporting
our regulatory environment, through the
Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and the
renewable energy target legislation, and sup-
porting R&D to bring on clean energy op-
tions such as solar, geothermal, wave, tidal
and biomass.

This takes me to the contribution by the
member for Kingston. I simply say that, as a
South Australian, she is clearly conscious of
the role that geothermal energy might play in
the energy mix. I was therefore delighted on
6 November, as the responsible minister, to
announce two geothermal grants for South
Australian projects under the Renewable
Energy Demonstration Program. This was
also acknowledged by the members for
Hindmarsh and Braddon—especially by the
member for Braddon, who referred to a simi-
lar grant for the purpose of researching and
developing a range of renewable energy op-
tions on King Island. These are grid-related
and also involve a focus on potential storage
capacity, which is the key to the baseload
renewable energy debate.

I go to the contribution by the member for
New England. I know that he makes a range
of valuable contributions to the House, but I
do take issue with his suggestion that the
government has given mixed messages on
renewable energy. I simply say to the mem-
ber for New England that we have an inte-
grated strategy that not only includes a regu-
laratory framework involving a price on car-
bon through the Carbon Pollution Reduction
Scheme but also includes a renewable energy
target, which guarantees that 20 per cent of
our energy will come from renewable
sources by 2020.

In support of renewable energy develop-
ment in Australia, I remind the House that
the renewable energy target represents a sub-
sidy to the renewable sector of $20-25 billion
by the Australian community. That is a sub-
stantial subsidy for facilitating the develop-
ment of renewable energy in Australia. I
would also remind the House that, over and
above those regulatory arrangements, the
government in the budget of this year put in
place a comprehensive clean energy strategy.

The strategy is not about picking winners.
It is about working with industry and re-
search organisations, including CSIRO and
our leading universities, to make progress on
research and development with a view to
proving-up potential baseload reliable re-
newable energy options in Australia. It
clearly facilitates a proper focus on carbon
capture and storage, because fossil fuels are
important to Australia. More importantly, it
allocates over $2 billion for research and
development of renewable energy in Aus-
tralia in the years to come.

The Solar Flagships program is potentially
the biggest solar flagship deployment in the
world. Expenditure will be in the order of
$1.5 billion and there will be two rounds for
the purpose of selecting the best potential
technology in Australia. The member for
New England raised the issue of second gen-
eration biofuels. I have already announced
on behalf of the government the allocation of
$15 million to a range of second generation biofuel options. This includes algae, which is very much the hope of the side, and also focuses on the potential use of wood for the purposes of developing second generation biofuels in Australia.

As for the geothermal issue, hopefully it is very much a reliable baseload power source for Australia, with a $50 million program for the purpose of assisting industry with what is an expensive drilling program to prove up geothermal activities in Australia. As for the issue of renewable energy generally and the broader range of renewable options, there is a further allocation of $560 million for the purposes of renewable energy investment in Australia. Some of those program announcements have been referred to by members in their thoughtful contributions to the debate today, such as those as to geothermal in South Australia, tidal in Victoria and, I might say, the integrated renewable energy proposal on King Island, in the seat of Brad- don. Clearly, we have put in place a well-thought-out clean energy strategy involving changes to the regulatory environment of Australia, of great benefit to the renewables sector, side by side with key strategic investments to facilitate research and development. Only through that research and development will we break through on the technology front and prove once and for all whether we can actually shore up on a commercial scale renewable energy in Australia. In conclusion, I commend the bill to the House and simply say I am appreciative of the support from the coalition in the facilitation of consideration of this bill.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading
Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (12.24 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement
Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (12.24 pm)—I move:
That order of the day No. 2, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.
Question agreed to.

SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 21 October, on motion by Ms Gillard:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.25 pm)—I rise to talk about the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009. The coalition does not oppose this bill. As detailed in the documentation associated with this bill, the bill has the effect of seeking to enshrine in legislation the moratorium that was announced as part of a review into the operation of the Comcare scheme. Given that moratorium, this bill has the effect of preventing non-government employers from seeking access to the Comcare scheme. While the amendment does not oppose this bill. As detailed in the documentation associated with this bill, the bill has the effect of seeking to enshrine in legislation the moratorium that was announced as part of a review into the operation of the Comcare scheme. Given that moratorium, this bill has the effect of preventing non-government employers from seeking access to the Comcare scheme. While the amendment does not detract from the power held by the minister to consider or to determine a request for entry to the scheme, it does have the effect of not obliging the minister to make a decision, which is the current situation under the existing law.

Despite not opposing this bill, I do wish to express some concerns held by the coalition, about the effect of amending this legislation,
within a broader context. I want to talk about what I think is a fundamental ideological divide in this parliament; that is, we the opposition—the Liberal and National parties—are always committed to choice and to allowing people to make their own decisions, whereas Labor always seem to be opposed to people making their own decisions and opposed to people being able to make their own choices. We see this across a range of issues, such as private health insurance and education, and we certainly see it in my shadow portfolio of workplace relations. For some reason the Labor Party have an ideological objection to employers and employees sitting down and organising their workplace in a way that they see fit and making arrangements that they believe are suitable to their own enterprise. As for the context of this bill, this is a bill that prevents workers and employers from determining an appropriate safety and rehabilitation system to cover their own workplace. Effectively, a non-government employer who might have ordinarily been eligible to join the Comcare scheme will now be forced to remain within their relevant state jurisdiction and will no longer have the option to join an alternative system of safety and compensation coverage. Therefore, Labor have removed the choice that such employers have as to how they would like to structure the safety and rehabilitation regime or the safety and compensation regime within their own workplace.

The coalition has questioned on numerous occasions and on many different issues why the Labor Party seek to restrict and reduce the choices of Australians. They do not have the same respect for freedom of choice that we have. They do not fundamentally respect the right of employers and workers to agree on circumstances within their enterprises that suit their own needs. Surely the employers and employees within a particular business are ultimately the people who are best placed to judge how they structure the arrangements to run that business. Labor’s hatred of this choice and their denial of employers’ and employees’ ability to get together and make those arrangements is evident all throughout the Fair Work Act and is evident throughout the way in which the Fair Work system is operating. These laws have taken away the right of an individual, an enterprise or a workplace to determine working conditions that are suitable for them. Employers and workers are not even able to speak to each other under these existing laws without risking being dragged before the industrial umpire. It is not clear to us in the coalition why the Labor Party have a fundamental objection to this occurring. Why is it that employers and employees cannot sit down and talk to each other without third parties being present? By taking away this right of workers and business to work together and to determine and agree on workplace arrangements that are suitable for them, they are taking away what I believe are the fundamental rights of people to be able to get together and come to arrangements that are suitable for them. But according to Labor, and this is enshrined within the Fair Work Act, it is really only third parties that can come in and solve workplace problems and make the decisions. They seek to take power away from the employers and they seek to take power away from the workers. They always seek to enhance the power of third parties.

We now see circumstances in which employers and workers have almost unanimously agreed to terms and conditions of employment in the context of negotiating a collective agreement only to have that agreement overturned by a third party. Conditions that have been agreed between workers and their employers can effectively only be operative if they have been ticked off by a third party. In other words, it is the unions that are mandated in every workplace and
they are mandated to be involved in every decision. This is why Labor are fundamentally opposed to workers and employers being able to make up their own minds. They have always opposed this freedom and they have done so because they are afraid that, if you give workers and business the ability to speak amongst themselves, that dilutes the power of the union movement. We all know about the massive debt that the Labor Party owe the union movement, particularly in relation to the 2007 election.

I am not going to go through a detailed analysis of the failings of the Fair Work Bill and how it is beginning to fail Australian workplaces, but we in the opposition are constantly being reminded as we go out into the community by employers and employees that these laws are the latest weapons that Labor is using to attack their fundamental freedom and right to choose. From these continued attacks, we in the coalition recognise that this one-size-fits-all approach that has been mandated by Labor is just not suitable. The idea that every workplace from Perth to Hobart to Cairns requires the same model to operate is just something that we wholeheartedly reject.

This bill today will set us up in a further direction: it further restricts choice and it further mandates the one-size-fits-all approach. The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in her second reading speech made comments about the advancement towards the harmonisation of occupational health and safety laws. The coalition’s position on that is that we are broadly supportive of a national system of occupational health and safety laws. The coalition’s position is that we are broadly supportive of a national system of occupational health and safety laws. We believe that it would provide business with more certainty and fewer compliance costs and ensure workplaces in general are provided with an appropriate and beneficial system or means of providing a safe workplace. We believe that a national system will deliver much better outcomes than the existing patchwork make-up of various state pieces of legislation. The coalition is concerned, though, that Safe Work Australia will be excessively controlled by state bureaucrats and that state bureaucrats rather than employers or employees will have a greater say about occupational health and safety affecting Australian workplaces. That said, the aim of achieving consistency in a broader occupational health and safety context is a laudable aim that retains our support.

This bill is reasonably innocuous, but it still advances Labor’s agenda to restrict choices in Australian workplaces. It strips away choice from workers, from business and from workplaces generally. It is part of Labor’s plan to make a one-size-fits-all approach to the regulation of industrial relations. So, while there are benefits associated with national consistency in general terms, there are downsides associated with imposing on workplaces rigid and inflexible terms and conditions which fail to meet and recognise the differing needs that occur in enterprises in different parts of the country. The bill enshrines what is already in operation—a moratorium on new employers having access to the Comcare scheme—so it has little practical consequence. We do not oppose it, but I do register the deep concerns that the opposition has about the direction that the Labor Party is taking industrial relations in this country.

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (12.34 pm)—I rise today to speak in support of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009. This bill amends the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 to provide absolute discretion for the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations to consider a request for declarations of eligibility for a licence to self-insure under this act. The Comcare scheme that is established by the act provides workers compensation
and occupational health and safety arrangements for Australian government employees and the assorted private companies that self-insure their liabilities for workers compensation under the scheme. Some of these private companies are former government business enterprises which were allowed to obtain Comcare coverage when they were sold. Other private companies that were allowed to take up Comcare coverage were those enterprises that operated in competition with these government business enterprises or in competition with former government business enterprises. This has seen the Comcare coverage extend into areas of private enterprise that the scheme was never designed for, such as mining, transport and construction.

There are now 29 corporations licensed to self-insure under the act. They include companies such as Asciano—formerly known as Pacific National—Chubb Security, John Holland, National Australia Bank and even TNT Australia. The Comcare scheme, as I have already said, was primarily designed for a different purpose and that was for white-collar jobs in the public sector—not blue-collar jobs in heavy industry or transport in some of the companies I have just mentioned. As we know, there is an existing moratorium, placed on 11 December 2007, to prevent new private sector entrants into Comcare. This bill will place the effect of that moratorium into the act.

Recently, as part of the harmonisation of occupational health and safety, the Workplace Relations Ministers Council proposed that, following the implementation of uniform occupational health and safety laws, coverage of Comcare self-insured licensees would be transferred to state and territory jurisdictions. There are very good reasons for that. Uniform OH&S laws and nationally consistent approaches to compliance and enforcement will remove Comcare’s need to provide OH&S coverage to self-insured licensees. Especially important to me is that transfer of this OH&S coverage will also reduce the number of dual-jurisdiction work sites. To me, it is quite ridiculous that you can have different workers working on the same site under different safety rules and procedures, but that can certainly happen under the current arrangements. You could have a large building site where, for instance, John Holland was the head contractor—and, as I have already described, that company comes under the Comcare scheme—but where all its subcontractors on the site, from all the various different trades and services, could well be covered by the state occupational health and safety acts. Therein lies the problem: which one takes precedent and which is right?

Both acts are worded differently and both have different provisions and operate in different forms. Currently, it is almost impossible to have a scheme that melds together the different state and federal acts that actually works on the ground and does what it should—that is, look after the people that are at that workplace, of whichever state they may be in. Under the Commonwealth and in each state and territory, workers compensation systems vary and they provide different coverage, different payments and different medical and rehabilitation expenses to injured workers and to dependants of workers who tragically die or who are injured whilst at work or because of the work they have been doing.

According to the 2008-09 report of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission, the number of Comcare investigators employed that year was 62. That is a significant increase from the 16 who were employed in 2004-05 but, as I have mentioned previously in the House, it is not sufficient to cover the expanded coverage of the scheme. Every year, over 300 Australian workers are killed at work. It is not known
how many die from various occupational diseases, but it has been estimated at 10 times that number. Every year, over 140,000 people are injured whilst they are at work. These figures are huge and they are appalling not only in human terms but also in dollar terms. The drain on the Australian economy is estimated at $34 billion per year. As I have said before in this House, there is no excuse for ignoring the safety of workers in the workplace. It should be the prime responsibility of every employer. There is nothing more important than a worker returning home at the end of a working day or shift in as good a shape as they were at the start of that day’s labour.

There is certainly no good reason why some workers should be afforded less protection at work than others in a different state or territory. As I have said, every state and territory has different acts and regulations covering occupational health and safety and workers compensation arrangements, and good practice and sometimes not-so-good practice can be found in every jurisdiction. What might have been good practice 15 or 20 years ago in one state may not be current good practice in other states. It may now not be best practice. But, as we all know, legislation ages and time moves quickly. For instance, it is very easy to forget that only 15 years ago the vast majority of the population had no access to or, in many cases, no knowledge of many things we take for granted today. Access to the internet and the ease with which you can get information is still relatively new. But many of the things that have been done in this place over the years have simply not kept up with that.

Fifteen years ago, just being able to find a copy of another state’s act, regulation or code of practice took a great deal of time and money, as you had to make phone calls, send letters and parcels across the country or have access to a very good technical library, which most people certainly did not have. Because of that the best practice outcomes in one state could remain buried within that state. That state may have enjoyed the benefits of that for some time, but most people in other states were not aware that there was better practice—not only in safety at work but also in many other legislative areas—elsewhere. As I said, with internet access now available virtually everywhere, there is a much greater need for consistency in the regulation of occupational health and safety. So, from my point of view, when a solution to a problem is found in one jurisdiction there is no reason why that should not be applied as best as it possibly can to any other jurisdiction.

One of my jobs prior to coming to this place was as a safety officer and at times I was a health and safety representative. I worked in the construction industry and I saw firsthand the effect of people not understanding safety systems or, even worse, understanding but not following them and I saw what could be the terrible results when shortcuts were taken with safety on site. When it comes to safety, there can be great communication and consultation but also agreement between the employer, the employees and the union. Many very good safety systems have, in the end, come into place because of consultation, not through argument but actually through agreement, which provides the best result for everyone in the workplace. When the system operates properly, it is about being proactive; it is not about reacting to something that has happened. It is about analysing the risks and working out what may happen before it does so that systems can be put in place to prevent it. The OH&S compliance issues that arise from having competing schemes operating are still not fully understood because, in many workplaces, they are still quite a new phenomenon. But the number of work site inspections, notices and
prosecutions are much lower under Comcare than under competing state schemes.

Last year in this place, when we were debating the Safe Work Australia (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2008, the member for Corio said:

… if you were an employer in Victoria—in the year 2005-06—
… you were 24 times more likely to be the subject of an inspection—under WorkSafe Victoria—than if you were an employer in the Commonwealth jurisdiction.

This figure does not indicate that work practices and safety outcomes improve just because an employer has managed to move from a state OH&S system and into the federal Comcare system. It comes about because of the very small number of inspectors who were employed then and are employed now and the work site inspections undertaken in comparison with WorkSafe Victoria.

There is an interesting report that was presented to the Workplace Relations Ministers Council way back in 2005. The Comparative performance monitoring seventh report of November 2005 found that Comcare undertook 245 ‘workplace interventions’, also known as site visits. In the same time, WorkSafe Victoria undertook 43,719. In that period Comcare issued only 17 safety prohibition and improvement notices in Victoria, whilst WorkSafe Victoria issued 12,492 notices. In 2008-09, Comcare had increased this to 46 prohibition and improvement notices—but this was still obviously behind. And in this report’s time frame Comcare did not prosecute anyone in Victoria, whilst WorkSafe Victoria launched 110 prosecutions that year. In 2008-09, Comcare covered 163,707 employees in the 29 licensed self-insurers, some of which I previously mentioned.

The role of a workplace inspector for a safety authority is a vital one, but there must be a sufficient number of inspectors to cover the workforce and there must be the will in the organisation to be proactive where it counts—that is, at the workface, on the job site. Just as important as the workplace inspector’s role is the development of proposals for national workers compensation arrangements for employers with workers in more than one jurisdiction. Rather than forcing states and territories to toe the Howard line—as we saw with the spectacular failure of Work Choices, where millions of workers were ripped off in their wages and conditions with no recompense—the Rudd government is vitally aware of the impact that changes in the workplace can have on the lives of working people. And although we know—we really know—that Work Choices is still held very dear to the hearts of all those opposite, without exception we see and hear, day after day, in this place and in the press, the sheer arrogance and the out-of-touch views that exist in the Liberal Party. Their views also extend in many cases to the safety of people on the job.

We do not need competing workers compensation and OH&S systems that provide different levels of safety and coverage. We need the best result for every worker, whether they be in one state or another. There should be no excuses for that. As the minister said in her second reading speech, when occupational health and safety powers go back to the states for all of these licensed self-insured companies under Comcare, there will be better safety outcomes because there will be more inspectors—more people on the job. They hopefully can not only stamp out bad practices but also guide into good practices. We need occupational health and safety systems and workers compensation schemes that work proactively to reduce accidents and
to improve safety outcomes. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr TREVOR (Flynn) (12.48 pm)—I wish to speak today on the government’s Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009, which will provide a number of key changes to the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988. This amendment bill will provide critical changes to current legislation and the Comcare scheme. The Comcare scheme provides workers compensation and occupational health and safety arrangements for employees of the Australian government and some of the private sector companies that self-insure their workers compensation liabilities under the scheme.

The Rudd Labor government promised at the last election that it would impose a moratorium on companies seeking to join the Comcare scheme and announced a review to ensure that Comcare was a suitable occupational health and safety and workers compensation scheme. Given the progress towards harmonised national occupational health and safety laws, and the proposed transfer of occupational health and safety coverage for Comcare self-insurers to the states and territories, the government has elected to formalise and maintain the moratorium in future legislation until 2010, when uniform occupational health and safety laws will have been implemented in all jurisdictions.

Currently, applications for inclusion in the Comcare scheme are automatic, bar for the moratorium put in place at the time of the Comcare review. The amendments in this bill will provide the minister with an absolute discretion to consider requests for declarations of eligibility for a Comcare self-insured licence under the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988. This will apply to new requests or applications and any existing applications that have been made but not determined. The changes will empower, but not oblige, the minister to consider requests for declarations of eligibility. It will also allow the minister to take into consideration important developments, such as the progress of occupational health and safety harmonisation. This effectively provides the minister with more flexibility to consider applications to join the scheme. The Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009 will effectively allow the minister to use their own discretion derived from experience and important relevant developments to consider requests, providing a fairer and more balanced and efficient system.

I do not like the Comcare scheme; I never have. In Queensland, employers, including self-insurers, should always, in my opinion, be obliged to have claims by injured employees assessed and determined under Queensland’s workers compensation laws. In Queensland, they are fair, just and reasonable. Comcare, in my experience, is not. Queensland, I believe, has the best set of workers compensation laws in this country. We should keep it that way in Queensland, but we should share our successful system with other states and territories and on a national basis.

I acknowledge that improvements to the Comcare scheme arising from the Comcare review have been made. These include the introduction of a statutory time limit for the consideration of workers compensation claims, reinstatement of workers compensation coverage for off-site recess breaks and the continuation of payment of medical and related costs where a worker’s weekly compensation benefits are suspended for their refusing to participate in the rehabilitation process. I further note that the government has recently increased substantially the lump sum and weekly death benefits under the...
Comcare scheme to align them more closely with death benefits payable under state workers compensation schemes. I also note that Comcare is undertaking a review of the permanent impairment arrangements in the scheme, in particular of the current permanent impairment guide. The purpose of this review is to determine whether the scheme provides reasonable access to, and reasonable levels of, compensation in the case of workplace injuries which result in a permanent impairment. But let us keep Comcare out of Queensland where possible.

Injuries at work can be devastating. They can result in physical and psychological impairment, financial hardship, marriage break-ups and other significant loss and damage. They can destroy a person’s earning capacity for life and throw injured workers and their families on the scrap heap. The Comcare review was long overdue. It is good to see some fairness and balance back in the system and protection of workers’ rights under the scheme, and I commend this bill to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.54 pm)—I rise to support the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009. This bill provides the minister with an absolute discretion to consider requests for declaration of eligibility for a Comcare self-funded licence under the act and it makes explicit that section 100 of the act empowers, but does not oblige, the minister to determine requests for declaration of eligibility. Prior to becoming a member of parliament, I worked with people who had been injured at work and came under the Comcare legislation. When the Comcare scheme was first introduced it was without a doubt the best scheme that had operated for injured workers, but over a period of time that has changed. It is now a very different sort of scheme and it needs to be reviewed. A number of changes have been made over the time that it has been in operation, and these changes have actually impacted in a way which, instead of providing the absolute best scheme and support for injured workers, goes a long way towards making it difficult for them. I know a number of rehabilitation providers and people I have worked with in a previous life put submissions in to the review because they could see that there was a great need for change.

I will touch a little on the background to the act and where it has gone over a period of time. The act was established to regulate the scheme for compensating and rehabilitating Commonwealth workers. That is how it was in the beginning, but in 1992 the act was amended to enable privatised Commonwealth government business enterprises to remain under the scheme. The Howard government further extended the eligibility to apply to be a self-insurer under the scheme—making it possible for Optus to become eligible to apply for a self-insurance licence—and that opened the gate for a number of corporations with no historic connection to the Commonwealth to apply to be granted self-insurer licences. There has been significant change to the way Comcare operates, and that is why, I believe, the minister felt quite strongly that there needed to be a review. In the 40th Australian parliament I was involved in a review of workers compensation schemes that operated throughout Australia. That report highlighted a number of deficiencies that existed. It also highlighted the fact that when a worker is injured at work that worker needs a proper program and support to get back to work.

The underlying assumption that was made prior to that inquiry was that most workers were noncompliant, that those workers applying for workers compensation were people who were trying to exploit the workers compensation system and preferred receiving compensation payments to working. I think it
was proven beyond doubt that that was not where injured workers were coming from. Rather, those people who suffered an injury at work had their lives affected in practically every way. The member for Flynn, who spoke previously, stated how workers who have been injured suffer the consequences of that injury, which can impinge on their life in so many ways but also that that injury often leads to social exclusion, the loss of family, marriage break-up and many other consequences—including the loss of a job, of course, which is one of the most predominant effects of suffering a workplace injury.

When a person injures themselves at work and is forced to look for a new job or loses their job, along with that they lose their identity. One of the first things that a person is asked when they walk into a room or they meet someone for the first time is, ‘What do you do?’ When that person is forced to say, ‘Oh, well, actually I’m not working at the moment; I’ve injured myself at work,’ that person is immediately seen in two ways: they are unemployed, which in itself has a stigma attached to it; and they have injured themselves at work, and if it is a back injury or something that is not visible there is a degree of scepticism associated with the fact that a person is receiving workers compensation. Immediately, the person is judged as being something and is not looked upon as a person in their own right.

The other consequence of work related injury is an enormous financial impost on the person who is injured. They suffer a reduction in income. They are not eligible for assistance through Newstart, a disability support pension or other Commonwealth payments because of the fact that a workers compensation payment is deemed to be equivalent to a payment through our social security system. That in itself creates a number of problems for those workers who are injured at work.

So you have the impact of the injury that, in a large number of circumstances, leads to a loss of job. You have the financial impact that occurs when a person is injured at work. And then you have the psychosocial impacts that accompany that workplace injury—the pressure it places on family and the fact that so many people who have workplace injuries end up with marriage break-ups, and along with marriage break-ups go changed situations within the family. There are issues that relate to the care of children and to every other aspect of a person’s life. What you have is a totally changed circumstance. One day you had a person who was going to work, earning an income that they had planned their life and their affairs around and maybe participating in sport or some other activity, and all of a sudden that was taken from them and they are now a person who is in receipt of workers compensation payments.

Comcare is one of the schemes that supports workers who are injured. In fact, I believe there are 410,000 employees who are covered by the Comcare scheme; the current number of licences under the scheme has reached 29. It is really important that schemes that look after injured workers provide a variety and a number of levels of support. We need to make sure that people who are injured at work, lose their job and lose their access to leisure activities undertake programs—programs where they can develop new skills—to help them to retrain and re-enter the workforce. Quite often, workers who injure themselves at work are in jobs that are totally unsuited for them post injury and post undertaking a physical rehabilitation program to redevelop their strengths and redevelop their capacities in a number of areas. Their capacities may not match up with the capacities needed to work in the job that they had prior to their injury.
Part of a good rehabilitation program is to assess a person’s physical tolerances and work capacities and then to compare those work tolerances and capacities with those required in their previous job. You also look at the type of job that a person with those capacities and tolerances can actually be employed in. Not only do we need to look at their capacities and tolerances; we need to look at their skills and their education levels. Then a plan has to be developed that will match that person, where they are now, to a job that they will be suitable for in the future. That can be quite a difficult process, because some people require quite a bit of assistance to get to the stage where they are able to look at a new and different kind of employment or job. The reason for that is that we need to address not only the skills level but also the psychosocial problems that can result from a workplace accident.

Quite often a worker will end up with some psychological problems because they have to come to terms with the loss of their job and the loss of physical function. As I mentioned earlier, they will need to go through a physical rehabilitation program and also a psychosocial program—one that helps them deal with loss and the issues of grieving associated with loss of function and loss of job and one that helps them cope with their injury. Part of that could even be a pain management program, because along with injury comes pain. One of the most difficult things for an injured person to do is manage pain and continue to be an active member in society. When we talk about Comcare and caring for workers who have been injured, it is quite a significant issue and it takes on a number of different parameters.

The legislation that we are debating today, the bill to amend the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act, is necessary because a party who has made an application and whose application has not been considered due to the moratorium that was put in place at the time of the announcement of the Comcare review has the potential to launch legal action against the Commonwealth over the validity of the moratorium. This legislation puts that to bed. It makes sure that there is no potential for that to happen. It is very important that the review is completed because it is well and truly long overdue.

I have already mentioned to the House that the Comcare scheme provides workers compensation and occupational health and safety arrangements for employees of the Australian government and of some private companies that self-insure their workers’ compensation liabilities under the scheme. I have spent considerable time talking about rehabilitation and I do so because I feel that it is of vital importance to people who are injured at work. I also believe that I need to bring to the attention of the House that the Rudd government did promise prior to the last election to impose a moratorium on companies seeking to join the Commonwealth scheme. The government announced a review to ensure that the Commonwealth Comcare scheme was a suitable OH&S and workers compensation system.

The reason that companies applied for entry is, I think, an indictment of the Howard government. Companies applied for entry to the Comcare scheme because they felt that their liability would be lower under it. The Howard government had eroded a scheme that was, in 1988, when it was first introduced, I believe, a state-of-the-art scheme. It was an absolutely fantastic scheme for injured workers trying to get back to work. But it became a scheme that employers sought to join in order to obtain a licence, because that then meant they did not have as high a level of liability for their employees.

Given the progress towards harmonisation of the national OH&S laws and the proposed
transfer of OH&S coverage of Comcare self-insurers to the states and territories, the government will maintain that moratorium until 2011 when uniform OH&S laws will be implemented in all jurisdictions. It is important that we have uniform laws so that people and companies or employers cannot pick and choose which jurisdiction they will employ their workers under. It is all about ensuring that our schemes deliver to workers and provide the right sort of safety net. That is what a workers compensation scheme is about. This change will ensure that there is no dislocation in the lead-up to the legislation taking effect after the moratorium period ends. It is very important that this legislation goes through the House. It gives me great pleasure to stand here today and support legislation that will ensure that the Comcare scheme will be a good, strong, workable scheme in the long term. I commend the bill to the House. (Time expired)

Mr HALE (Solomon) (1.15 pm)—I rise today to make some brief comments in support of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009. The bill proposes to amend section 100 of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988, the SRC Act, to provide the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations with an absolute discretion to consider requests for declarations of eligibility for a Comcare self-insured licence under the SRC Act. The aim of the amendment is to make explicit that section 100 of the SRC Act empowers but does not oblige the minister to consider or determine requests for declarations of eligibility. This amendment will apply to new requests or applications and to any existing applications that have been made but not determined.

There was a reasonable amount of consultation on this bill. Comcare and the Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission were consulted on the impact that the measures would have on the Comcare self-insurance licence scheme. I would like to commend the contributions made by the members for Shortland, Deakin and Flynn. The member for Deakin has a long history of fighting for the rights of workers, and I enjoyed his contribution in particular. Having said that, the bill is not opposed by the opposition, although the member for Stirling did touch on some of the concerns the opposition has about the bill. Certainly the comments he made were about the broader ideology of what the Labor government is about. I think that, in this case, his comments were not warranted. This is one of those times when, with a piece of non-controversial legislation, the opposition once again has chosen to drive the idea that there is some sort of hidden agenda, some sort of left-wing conspiracy out there. That is not the case at all.

The bill is for the Comcare scheme that provides workers compensation and occupational health and safety arrangements for employees of the Australian government and of some private sector companies that self-insure their workers compensation liabilities under the scheme. It was a promise at the last election that a Rudd Labor government would impose a moratorium on companies seeking to join the Comcare scheme, and we announced a review to ensure that Comcare was a suitable OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system. Given the progress towards the harmonised national OH&S workers compensation system.
The government will introduce legislation to give effect to the moratorium for this further period. Currently, applications for inclusion in the Comcare scheme are automatic, bar the moratorium that was put in place at the time of the Comcare review. The government had regard to the Report of the review of self-insurance arrangements under the Comcare scheme, prepared by the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations. The department’s report drew on information from stakeholder consultations, and there were over 80 written submissions to the review. The department engaged Taylor Fry Consulting Actuaries to collect the information and provide expert advice to inform the review.

This bill aims to continue to improve the systems that we have in place with regard to workers compensation and safety and rehabilitation. As the member for Deakin said, over 300 people lose their lives and 120,000 people are injured at work in Australia each year. Those figures are horrendous, and there is no excuse for them. If one person loses their life at work, it is one person too many. If one person is injured at work, it is one person too many. In a modern, industrialised country such as Australia it is paramount that, as we develop and become a stronger economic base and a stronger First World country, we make sure that we have laws that suit our development in how we care for and look after our workers. It is not good enough that any shortcuts are taken with the safety of workers in this country. Certainly all speakers in this debate have touched on the importance of our laws and our work safety authorities to make sure that our workers are safe at all times. It is very important that as we advance in technology, as we advance in making machinery and in using industrialised machinery in workshops and factories, we continue to update our workplace safety procedures as well as upskill our workers with regard to their personal safety and the safety of workers who are around them. As I said, 300 people losing their lives at work in Australia each year is an unacceptable statistic. It is something that we really need to address and continue to address quickly.

I would like to briefly mention a person who, unfortunately, lost their life earlier this week—a Northern Territorian by the name of David Magree. David was married to Julee. They had three children—Michael, Allison and Rachael. David was a drill operator at the Granites mine, near Alice Springs. He was 50 years old.

There is an ongoing investigation into what has happened, so I will not make comment regarding the events that surrounded David’s untimely passing. But I will say that the people within my office work closely with his son, Michael, who is the Transport Workers Union delegate and organiser in Darwin and who does a fantastic job. Obviously, the Transport Workers Union works closely with the trucking industry, and so many truck drivers in this country lose their lives each year. Our heartfelt condolences go out to Michael, to his mother, Julee, and to his two sisters, Allison and Rachael, on the untimely passing of their father, David. It came as a great shock to the whole community. David was just 50 years old and unfortunately succumbed to injuries that he received at the Granites mine on Monday morning. To the Magree family I put on the record my condolences and those of the Labor Party in the Northern Territory, of my office and of the offices of Warren Snowdon and Senator Trish Crossin.

It is very important that we continue, as I said, to analyse our work safety procedures and to make sure that Australian workplaces are the safest in the world. As our productivity rises, we should make sure that enough of our earnings, enough of the money that we
make and enough of the money that goes to shareholders consequently is put back into ensuring that the capital continues to improve and that the maintenance is done on the machinery and infrastructure with which workers work. As I said, this bill is non-controversial and I support it. It will amend section 100 of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 to provide the minister with the absolute discretion to consider requests for declarations of eligibility for a Comcare self-insured licence under the SRC Act. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (1.24 pm)—I thank all members who spoke—the members for Stirling, Deakin, Flynn, Shortland and Solomon—for their contributions to this debate. The Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2009 needs to be viewed in the context of the government’s response to the review of the Comcare scheme and the significant progress that has been made by the Rudd government towards nationally harmonised occupational health and safety arrangements. In December 2007 the government initiated a review of the Comcare scheme. The purpose of the review was to ensure that Comcare was a suitable OH&S and workers compensation scheme for self-insurers and their employees. The government at that time also announced a moratorium on new companies joining the scheme pending the outcome of the review.

Since that review commenced, significant milestones have been achieved towards the long sought after goal of nationally harmonised OH&S arrangements.

In July 2008, the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments formally agreed, through an intergovernmental agreement, to develop and adopt a nationally uniform OH&S legislative framework. All the states and territories and the Commonwealth have committed to adopt uniform OH&S laws by 2011, complemented by nationally consistent approaches to compliance and enforcement. The government has established a new agency, Safe Work Australia, to develop the new laws. Following the passage in September 2009 of the Safe Work Australia Act 2008, Safe Work Australia has been established as an independent statutory agency with its primary responsibility being to improve OH&S and workers compensation arrangements across Australia. An exposure draft model OH&S act has recently undergone a six-week period of public consultation, led by Safe Work Australia. The Workplace Relations Ministers Council will consider the amended draft for endorsement when it next meets in December.

In June 2009, the Workplace Relations Ministers Council noted that it was proposed to transfer OH&S coverage of self-insured licensees from the Comcare scheme to state and territory jurisdictions following the implementation of uniform OH&S laws in all jurisdictions. Uniform OH&S laws and nationally consistent approaches to compliance and enforcement will remove the need for Comcare’s OH&S coverage of licensees. The transfer of OH&S coverage will also reduce the number of dual jurisdiction work sites. These developments mean that the landscape in which self-insurers under the Comcare scheme and their employees are operating has changed significantly since the government initiated the Comcare review. In September 2009, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations announced a number of improvements to the Comcare scheme arising out of the review. These included the introduction of a statutory time limit for the consideration of workers compensation claims and reinstatement of workers compensation coverage for off-site recess breaks. In addition, medical and rehabilitation costs will continue to be paid where a worker’s weekly compensation benefits are suspended.
for refusing to participate in the rehabilitation process.

The government has also recently increased substantially the lump sum and weekly death benefits under the scheme and Comcare is undertaking a review of the permanent impairment arrangements under the scheme. The minister will direct Comcare to strengthen its enforcement of OH&S and will write to Comcare and ask it to issue guidance material to assist employers in improving consultation with all workers at or near the workplace, not just their direct employees. These measures are designed to improve the Comcare scheme by reducing injuries, strengthening the focus on rehabilitation and return to work and increasing benefits for injured workers. The minister also announced that the government will maintain the moratorium on new companies joining the scheme until 2011, when uniform OH&S laws will have been implemented in all jurisdictions. Given the proposed transfer of OH&S coverage of Comcare self-insurers to states and territories, to do otherwise would be disruptive to new entrants to the scheme and their employees, who would need to adapt to Comcare’s current OH&S arrangements and then quickly change again to adapt to the new harmonised OH&S laws.

Now that the moratorium is to continue for a further period, the government considers that it is appropriate to formalise the arrangements for the moratorium through legislation. The bill amends section 100 of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act in order to maintain the moratorium until 2011. Section 100 provides for the minister to declare corporations that meet certain criteria to be eligible to apply for a self-insurance licence. The proposed amendment will give the minister greater flexibility in dealing with applications under section 100 of the SRC Act.

The amendment will enable the minister to consider important developments, such as progress with OH&S harmonisation, in deciding whether to consider any applications to join the Comcare scheme. The proposed amendment provides that the minister is not compelled to consider a request for a declaration of eligibility under section 100 by corporations seeking to join the Comcare scheme as self-insurers. This would apply to new applications, and any existing applications that have been made but not determined.

The bill will provide the minister with a clear discretion on whether or not to consider a request for a declaration. It makes it explicit that section 100 of the SRC Act empowers, but does not oblige, the minister to consider requests for declarations of eligibility. This measure is part of the government’s broader strategy of improving workplace safety arrangements for all workers and for all businesses, irrespective of the scheme under which they operate. With those comments, I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (1.31 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

AVIATION TRANSPORT SECURITY AMENDMENT (2009 MEASURES No. 2) 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 GRAY (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia) (1.32 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (NEW ZEALAND OVERSEAS TRAINED DOCTORS) BILL 2009**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 21 October, on motion by Ms Roxon:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (1.33 pm)—The Health Insurance Amendment (New Zealand Overseas Trained Doctors) Bill 2009 proposes to alter the operation of section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act 1973. Section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act came into force through an amendment made to the act in 1996. In the early to mid-1990s the prevailing view within the Hawke-Keating government was that Australia produced enough medical graduates to meet the nation’s health needs. Indeed some, including the then health minister, Graham Richardson, thought that there were too many doctors when in fact shortages were emerging. When the Howard government came to power in 1996 it set out to correct those problems. Section 19AB was one of the changes implemented. Overseas training doctors who started to work in Australia from 1 January 1997, if they wished to access Medicare benefits for their services, needed to practice in rural and remote areas, areas of health workforce shortages, for a period of 10 years. It became known as the 10-year moratorium.

The purpose was, and remains, to influence distribution of the medical workforce in rural and remote areas of Australia, ensuring communities in remote locations have access to medical services. It is generally agreed that the requirements have been successful and have had significant and beneficial impacts on workforce outcomes. Indeed, overseas trained doctors have been fundamental to the continued delivery of healthcare services in many remote communities and have become valued members of those communities.

The government’s audit last year of the rural health workforce revealed that this policy had made a difference to health services being provided in the bush and the minister acknowledged, in introducing this bill, that it has proven to be an effective mechanism to providing services to communities with the greatest needs—so much so that 41 per cent of doctors in rural and remote Australia have been trained overseas. Many communities are reliant on these medical practitioners and would not have practising GPs without them.

The main provision of this bill will make it easier for New Zealand doctors to work in Australia. It will remove the 10-year moratorium restrictions on New Zealand citizen and permanent resident doctors trained at New Zealand or Australian medical schools. The change effectively removes these doctors from the classification of ‘overseas trained doctor’ and ‘former overseas medical student’ in section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act. The other significant change in this legislation is to alter the commencement date of the 10-year moratorium on overseas trained doctors. It will remove the requirement for overseas trained doctors to have both Australian permanent residency or citizenship and medical registration in order for the 10-year moratorium period to commence. The changes will see the moratorium commence from the time a medical practitioner is
first registered, to recognise that some overseas doctors work in Australia for several years on a visa before seeking residency or citizenship. The government makes these changes at the same time as it intends to scale back the moratorium, with 3,600 overseas trained doctors able to shorten the term of the moratorium from July next year by serving in the most remote locations. The coalition will watch the impact of that particular measure closely.

The coalition has long been concerned with ensuring provision of medical services in regional and remote areas of Australia. Apart from introducing section 19AB of the act, which this bill will amend, the Howard government established key and innovative programs to encourage medical professionals to train and establish practices in regional areas. Indeed, in the first budget of the Howard government in 1996-97, the then government established University Departments of Rural Health programs. They exist now in 11 regional locations and an evaluation carried out last year—10 years after their inception—found that they have made a significant contribution to rural health outcomes and influenced rural and remote practitioners to remain in practice.

The Rural Clinical Schools program followed in the year 2000 and 10 of these schools were established in that first year. Another four were launched in 2006-07. Clinical schools enable medical students to undertake extended blocks of training in regional areas. Again, the review of these programs commissioned by the Department of Health and Ageing last year found that the RCS program has delivered convincingly and with the University Rural Health program was contributing to enhancing the rural health workforce. The full worth of the RCS program will only start to become evident in the next few years as its early cohort start establishing themselves in medical practice.

The rural health workforce will also be boosted by students assisted under the Bonded Medical Places scheme. Hundreds of medical students have been provided with financial help, which will see them work for six continuous years in rural and remote areas.

Given the long lead times in producing medical graduates, it is only in this current financial year that the first of these doctors will commence their return of service obligation in rural areas. The current government, as much as it seeks to denigrate the former coalition, will in fact reap the benefits of the forward-thinking policies of the former government. Generally across the health workforce increasing numbers of health professionals will be graduated from the nation’s medical schools over the next few years. All of these students will have begun their career path under the coalition government. It is hoped that significant numbers of them will consider practising in regional Australia and thus contribute to alleviating the uneven distribution of the health workforce, which unfortunately disadvantages those living outside major centres. This bill has wide support across medical representative bodies. The coalition supports these changes to the legislation.

Mr Neumann (Blair) (1.39 pm)—I speak in support of the Health Insurance Amendment (New Zealand Overseas Trained Doctors) Bill 2009. Until the mid-1990s, it was commonly the perception amongst the Australian public that we could produce our own doctors in sufficient numbers to ensure that our population, as we continued to grow in the seventies, eighties, nineties and beyond, could cope—that we produced enough graduates. Then in the 1990s and beyond we decided to make it more difficult and more restrictive for people to train as general practitioners and specialists. We often insisted on primary degrees before medical degrees
could be undertaken. In regional and remote areas, particularly places in my area of South-East Queensland such as Somerset, Fassifern and the Lockyer Valley, it was clear that there were increasing problems getting doctors into those areas.

I served on the health community council for the Ipswich and West Moreton area for the best part of 10 years. During that time I chaired the Esk health reference committee and visited all those regional hospitals at Boonah, Laidley, Gatton—subsequently when I was a candidate, in respect of Gatton—and also the Esk hospital on numerous occasions as well as Ipswich General Hospital and other facilities. It became very obvious to me and to many people in South-East Queensland outside of the Brisbane metropolitan area that we simply did not have enough doctors. There were not enough doctors and not enough doctors with the right to practise. It was increasingly difficult no matter what we did in terms of expanding the remuneration packages and whether or not we could give a right to private practice if they were linked to that hospital to bring doctors and their families to those areas. This is a real problem for rural and regional Australia, particularly for areas outside of Ipswich, in places that are between Ipswich and Toowoomba, up through the South Burnett as well, up in the Kingaroy and Nanango areas.

Legislation and funding which enables greater accessibility and more doctors to be brought to those areas is good legislation and worthy of support. Both sides of politics were a little short sighted when it came to looking at doctor training. Certainly I do not share the member for Dickson’s appreciation and belief that the Howard government was strongly committed to the health system. That was not the evidence of the Institute of Health and Welfare before the last federal election in October 2007 when effectively it said very clearly and categorically that the Howard government had failed with respect to the health and hospital system and that the states, territories and private providers had to take up the slack where the Howard government had failed.

But there is a disproportionate response in terms of the practice of doctors throughout the country. More doctors can be found in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane than there should be. There should be more doctors in places like Kingaroy, Nanango, Laidley, Esk and Gatton. The people in those areas deserve just the same kind of health care and hospital accessibility as people who live in our major capital cities. This legislation, which effectively opens up the right to practise and effectively allows it to be easier for New Zealand residents who are medical practitioners to practise and to get a right to practise in Australia, is worthy of support.

About four years ago the local division of general practice in my area, along with the University of Adelaide, commissioned a report looking at doctor numbers and the needs of the Ipswich and West Moreton community. Bear in mind that Queensland, according to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data, grew by 2.6 per cent and the Ipswich area grew by 4.1 per cent in the last 12 months. It goes to show that in the very fast growing area of South-East Queensland we need more and more health services, more and more doctors, more and more nurses and more and more allied health professionals.

Four years ago that study found that we had one GP for every 1,609 people living in the Ipswich and West Moreton area. That is simply not good enough, particularly as it found that in the next five to 10 years about one-third of the GP workforce would retire. We have seen numbers increase in the areas west of Brisbane, but it is simply not good enough. Legislation here that will go towards increasing the number of doctors, particu-
larly New Zealand doctors, able to practise is warmly welcomed.

Most overseas trained doctors come to Australia through a temporary skilled visa category for an initial period of up to about four years. We saw that in the category of visa called the temporary medical practitioner visa subclass 422. It was extended from two years to four years in 2003, and since 2005 doctors have entered Australia via the subclass known as the 457 visa. In fact, the New South Wales health department for a long time has been one of the biggest users of 457 visas in the country.

Overseas trained doctors and former overseas medical students who were first recognised after 1 January 1997 have been restricted from providing professional services that attract Medicare benefits for a period of 10 years. As the shadow minister correctly noted, it is commonly called the 10-year moratorium. New Zealand citizens and permanent resident doctors practising in Australia are likewise subject to that restriction. A bit of history is important because a lot of people think that with Australia and New Zealand it is easy to enter one country or stay in the other, but in fact it was in 1973, under the trans-Tasman travel arrangement, that New Zealand and Australian citizens were first entitled to rights to visit, live and work in each other’s countries without the need to apply for any authority to do so. Changes in the Migration Act 1958 in September 1994 required all noncitizens lawfully in Australia to hold visas; however, this led to the introduction of a special visa category which is known in Australia as the Australian special category visa.

So, when a New Zealand citizen comes to, say, the Brisbane international airport and goes to line up, there is a sign which says ‘Australian and New Zealand citizens’. They waltz in there, present their passport at immigration and it is considered that they have made application for a visa. There is examination of their status in terms of health and character considerations, but automatically they receive that visa. Of course, there is a check to see if they are subject to criminal sanctions, prosecution or arrest or whether there is anything to be considered in relation to, say, the Hague convention on child abduction. It is not necessary for a New Zealand citizen who holds that special category visa to apply for or be granted permanent residency in Australia, because they are accepted.

We have hundreds of thousands of New Zealand citizens in Australia and they enrich our lives, our communities and our country. We see the benefit of New Zealand citizens in this country who contribute to our economy and pay taxes and participate in our community lives, in our sporting clubs, in our charitable institutions, in our churches and in other institutions in our community. We accept them as our brothers and sisters from across the Tasman. Perhaps it is only in circumstances when we play sport against them, particularly when they wear black shirts and are known as the All Blacks, that we are particularly aggressive and vociferous concerning our sisters and brothers from across the Tasman who are living in Australia. Sometimes I wonder whether we should cease to play Rugby Union tests in Melbourne, because they do not know anymore that, in fact, they are home games for us!

Getting back to the legislation before the House, it looks to streamline the operation of section 19AB of the Health Insurance Act and remove some irregularities which are there. I will go through those. The main provisions in this bill relate to removing restrictions applicable to doctors who are New Zealand permanent residents and citizens and who obtain their primary medical education at an accredited medical school in New Zea-
land or Australia, such as, for example, the University of Queensland St Lucia campus in Brisbane or over in Dunedin, Christchurch or Auckland. The change effectively removes these New Zealand citizens and permanent residents from the classification which we call an overseas trained doctor—or, indeed, a former overseas medical student—whom we are henceforth going to call a foreign graduate of an accredited medical school. That change will be reflected in section 19AB of the act.

This is being done because there is a lack of correlation between the Australian Citizenship Act 1948 and the Migration Act. The Australian Citizenship Act 1948 provides New Zealand citizens living in Australia with so many of the benefits and rights of Australian citizenship. As I said before, they can live here without the need to obtain a permanent residency visa. However, the Health Insurance Act requires the Department of Health and Ageing to refer to the Migration Act 1958, which is the authority for determining status concerning residency. Regrettably, the Migration Act categorises New Zealand citizens and permanent residents to be temporary residents of Australia and, correspondingly, New Zealand doctors are considered to be overseas trained doctors if they were first recognised as medical practitioners, as so many of them were, after 1 January 1997.

What we are doing here is changing that. The bill will change the eligibility for New Zealand residents, but it is also going to help Australian doctors who are trained here in Australia. Schools which are accredited by the Australian Medical Council will be considered as having the same standards as the Australian medical schools. It is going to benefit Australian doctors across the Tasman and it is also going to benefit New Zealand doctors in Australia.

That is a good thing because it effectively means that they can easily get access to the rights to a medical practice and can practise and operate in those rural communities. Indeed, I simply do not know how we can provide adequate services, particularly in rural and regional Queensland, without the benefit of overseas trained doctors, as the shadow minister also said. If we can add more medical practitioners to those areas by allowing New Zealanders, citizens and permanent residents, to practise in those areas, it will benefit the health needs of those rural and regional communities.

There are a number of other changes and I will go through those briefly. We are amending, as I said before, the term ‘former overseas medical student’. The term ‘former overseas medical student’ is sometimes misunderstood and is not clear to many people. It is a strange term. It has been renamed ‘foreign graduate of an accredited medical school’, which I think is beneficial and certainly removes the confusion. The other thing that the bill does, which I think is beneficial, is amend section 19AC of the act. It introduces a period in which medical practitioners can apply for a review of a decision to refuse or grant an exemption or impose conditions under section 19AB. At the moment, there is no such time limit, so the whole thing can drag out for an endless period of time. Certainty and specificity is important.

This legislation is helpful, both nationally and to my community. I had the privilege of hosting, with the University of Queensland, Ipswich campus, a health forum in my area where these issues were discussed. I want to pay tribute to Professor Helen Chenery, the Deputy Executive Dean, Academic, at the University of Queensland in the Faculty of Health Sciences, for assisting me in putting on that forum. Issues such as the need for more doctors in our area were discussed. The
need for equity and the need for access to better health care were topics of much discussion at that forum, as was the need for empowerment of consumers. If you get more doctors who are willing to practise and want to work in particular areas, you will improve health care and you will make consumers of health services feel that they are more important. You will make them feel that they are accepted and not put away. Seven million Australians live in regional and rural areas—that is, nearly a third of all Australians live outside the metropolitan area. We cannot afford to forget them. They need the kind of health care that all of us should enjoy. I think Australians believe that, when it comes to access to health care, everyone should get a fair go. What we need to think about seriously is the regions in which these kinds of doctors that we are talking about can go to, where there can be greater innovation, and access the right to practise and also the ability to collaborate with other allied health professionals.

I mentioned the University of Queensland, Ipswich campus, and the health forum. I mentioned how people discussed the need for more doctors to come to our area and how this legislation will impact and help. That site will be the location of the GP superclinic—a fulfilment of the Rudd Labor government’s election commitment made by the then shadow health spokesperson, Nicola Roxon, now Minister for Health and Ageing. Nicola Roxon came to Ipswich during the last federal campaign and made a commitment that we would deliver a GP superclinic. We estimate that can deliver somewhere between 12 and 14 doctors. I imagine there will be New Zealand doctors who will work at that particular clinic. That clinic will have a very strong focus on obesity, which is a chronic problem in my area, as well as type 2 diabetes, which is an increasing challenge for electorates across the country. We need doctors. Having more New Zealand trained doctors would be beneficial in my area as well as having more overseas trained doctors who are fluent in English and have sufficient proficiency and qualifications to practise as doctors in regional and rural Queensland.

The legislation that we have before us today, which we are examining and I hope will pass, is part of the matrix of what the Rudd Labor government wants to do with respect to health care reform. I commend the government for what it has done with respect to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission. The health forum in Ipswich that I mentioned was just one of dozens which have been undertaken across the country by the Minister for Health and Ageing and, indeed, the Prime Minister, who has gone to many. The final report of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission says that our health system has many strengths, but it has many weaknesses as well. We need to alleviate the increasing pressure on the health system with additional funding and changes of governance and structure. As our population grows, and it is growing rapidly, we will face greater health needs. In this country we are facing a demographic tsunami as our population grows older. We will have many challenges. We will have challenges to cope with, with an ageing population, but we will also see an increase in our birth rate. We are seeing that in my area. Bringing doctors from across the Tasman into my area will benefit the people in my community. Anything that we can do to assist in primary health care, with a greater emphasis on acute care and preventative care, is important. Spending less than two per cent of our health expenditure on preventative health is simply not good enough. In the future we need to make sure that our doctors, whether they come from New Zealand or overseas or whether they are trained locally, have a greater emphasis on
preventative health care as part of their primary education. That should be a focus. I commend this legislation to the House. *(Time expired)*

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.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Asylum Seekers**

Mr Turnbull (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister and I refer him to the recent comments of the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the UN, Palitha Kohona:

If the pull factors are addressed, attempts to enter Australia will cease. The lucky country is a magnet and many will seek to enter it.

When will the Prime Minister stop seeking to offload responsibility to other countries for the surge in Australia of unauthorised arrivals and recognise the need to restore strength and integrity to Australia’s border protection laws?

Mr Rudd—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He makes reference specifically to Sri Lanka in his question, and of course a range of measures arise from that in our cooperation with Sri Lanka as a source country for those who are seeking to go to other parts of the world because of the civil disturbances in that country earlier this year—in fact, a very bloody civil war which has seen some 260,000 people internally displaced within that country, 130,000 having gone to India, many thousands having sought to go and successfully gone to France and Germany as well as to Canada and the United States, and so far some 600 or so having come to Australia.

On the question of Sri Lanka, I draw the honourable member’s attention to the fact that as a product of our cooperation with the Sri Lankan government and in consultation with the Sri Lankan authorities, we have been assisted in interrupting people-smuggling ventures between Sri Lanka and Australia and between Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Yesterday I informed the House of the general number of interruptions which have occurred with the Indonesians, the Malaysians and the Sri Lankans. Of course honourable members would be aware of reports that on 23 and 24 November Sri Lankan authorities located and intercepted four people-smuggling ventures off the coast of Sri Lanka that were believed to be headed in this direction.

We will continue to work closely with the Sri Lankan authorities, as all responsible governments of Australia would do. On the question of the conditions within Sri Lanka I would also draw the honourable member’s attention to the work being done by our special representative, John McCarthy, formerly High Commissioner to India, who is working with the Sri Lankan authorities both on people-smuggling cooperation and on internally displaced persons and resettlement and reconstruction. Also, what we have done with the Sri Lankan government, based on the recent visit to Colombo by the Foreign Minister, is to confirm our continued cooperation with the Sri Lankans to assist with their humanitarian and resettlement challenges, including providing more than $35 million in development assistance to Sri Lanka this financial year, $5 million to support the resettlement of internally displaced persons and $2.3 million for de-mining the former conflict areas. This is particularly important given the heavy use of landmines in the area, which is of concern in the resettlement process, and given the number of landmines used in the civil war against the LTTE.

Our continued cooperation with Sri Lanka is important. It is part of a comprehensive response to the global challenge of people-smuggling with the Sri Lankans, with the
Malaysians and with the Indonesians and, of course, provides proper support and investment for our customs protection and border security forces who are at work in the air and on the sea at present in dealing with a challenge not just for this country but for the entire region and for the world.

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme

Ms BURKE (2.04 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister explain the significance of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme to Australia’s economic and environmental future?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question. Indeed, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme has been the subject of some discussion and debate in recent days on both sides of the House. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, if you drill into its absolute essentials, is about reducing carbon pollution, it is about helping families with the adjustment costs arising from a higher price of carbon, it is about helping industries adjust, it is about boosting green jobs for the future and it is about helping cool the planet. That is why we are engaged in this Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

The Department of Climate Change and Water forecasts that Australia’s domestic emissions will peak between 2011 and 2013. For the first time in our nation’s history Australia would then be producing less carbon each year. This is something of which every Australian could and should be proud. Furthermore, it is forecast that by 2020 the government’s climate change measures will have reduced carbon pollution in Australia by 138 megatons below the business as usual baseline. Again, this is something of which all Australians should be proud. On top of that, if you translate that into a motor vehicle equivalent, the numbers are quite stunning. It is equivalent to reducing Australia’s carbon pollution by taking 35 million cars off the road. That is approximately twice the size of the entire Australian motor vehicle fleet. This, again, is something of which all Australians should be proud.

Treasury modelling also has provided us with advice about the impact we will face across the Australian economy as a consequence of this action through the CPRS, particularly in relation to the further growth of the renewable energy sector. Treasury modelling projects that by 2050 the Australian renewable energy electricity sector will be 30 times as large as it is today. This is what we call green jobs for the future.

The Climate Institute study shows that $31 million of clean energy projects are already underway or planned in response to the government’s climate change policies. Again, this is good news for green jobs and for the economy. These investments are expected to generate around 26,000 new jobs, many of them in regional Australia. So these are good developments when it comes to the overall economic impact of introducing a carbon pollution reduction scheme as well.

Beyond that, for the business community, an important consequence flows from the agreement reached between the government and the opposition on the passage of this Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme through the Senate. The agreement reached with the opposition yesterday will result in the CPRS now providing business with the certainty to make investments in the future. This is what business has been calling for for a long, long time. I would quote what the head of the BCA has had to say about this only in the last day or so. Graham Bradley, the BCA President, said:

When passed, the legislation will enable Australian businesses to plan for and make the required decisions about investments to transition Australia to a low-emissions economy in the future.
This is important certainty for the Australian business community.

The other thing which we need to be very mindful of in this debate is the cost of inaction. We have spoken just now of the consequences of acting, after 12 years, through this Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, an emissions trading scheme for the future. The costs of inaction also need to be registered for all those who are mindfully engaged in this debate. First of all, we need to be very clear about the fact of what would happen to the Australian economy were we to see inaction nationally and globally. The Stern review has concluded that, if we fail to act, the overall costs of climate change will be equivalent to losing between five and 20 per cent of global GDP each year, now and into the future. Put that into Australian terms—what would that translate to? A cost of between 2½ thousand dollars and $10,000, in today’s dollars, for every Australian every year. These are significant costs, and that is before we go to the regional costs, both economic and environmental.

The recent Oxford Economics report commissioned by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation finds that climate change related coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef may cost $37.7 billion in lost economic value. Furthermore, the Great Barrier Reef alone attracts some two million tourists each year, supporting tourism across the region and generating over $4.9 billion in tourism and employment for around 60,000 people, something for which I know the member for Leichhardt and other members from Queensland are deeply concerned. Without action on climate change, the Garnaut review showed, by 2030 the value of agricultural production in the Murray-Darling Basin would shrink by 12 per cent, and by 49 per cent by 2050. That is why it is essential that we act on climate change also to support the future of agricultural production in our country. More than 90,000 people are employed in agriculture in the Murray-Darling Basin. Their jobs are important, like the jobs of all Australians, those jobs also which are being generated from tourism on the Barrier Reef and those jobs which can be generated by a new, clean, green renewable energy sector as well.

Finally, on cost, can I say this: let none of us underestimate the costs which flow from the increased incidence of extreme weather events which come as a consequence of climate change—whether it is heat waves, drought, hail storms, tropical cyclones or fires. The serious consequences in terms of the human costs and the serious consequence in terms of the cost of insurance: these constitute the costs of inaction, and they are as much a part of the debate as the adjustment costs associated with action. Therefore, this Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is on about the business of reducing carbon pollution in Australia. It is about helping cool the planet. It is about how we help our families adjust to higher carbon costs in the future, how we help our industries adjust to higher carbon costs in the future and how we generate the green jobs of the future. I would thank the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition for supporting this legislation in its passage through the parliament. We believe this is legislation in the Australian national interest and in the interests of our kids, our grandkids and the future economy.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.11 pm)—I inform the House that we have in the gallery this afternoon Gareth Evans, a former member of this place; a former minister, including a former foreign minister; and, regrettably, also a former member of the other place—but we will allow that! We warmly welcome him.

Talking about the other place, we also have a former member of the other place,
John Tierney, in the gallery this afternoon and he is most welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr Turnbull (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his pre-election commitment to curb the criminal trade in people smuggling by ‘turning back the boats’. Given that 54 boats carrying more than 2,400 people, almost a fifth of our annual total humanitarian intake, have reached Australia since the Prime Minister weakened our border protection laws, will he confirm that he has now outsourced Australia’s refugee program to the people smugglers, and isn’t this just another broken Labor promise?

Mr Rudd—I welcome the question from the Leader of the Opposition on people smuggling because I have some further information for the House today. This is a statement just released by the Australian Federal Police. It says:

Two Indonesian men have been charged with the people-smuggling offences after the alleged attempt to facilitate the arrival of 52 people in Australia. The 32-year-old man and 18-year-old man will appear in Perth Magistrates Court today.

The Australian Federal Police charged the men with one count of facilitating the bringing of non-citizens into Australia, of five or more people, contrary to section 232A of the Migration Act 1958.

The men arrived on 9 October 2009 on a vessel that was intercepted by the Royal Australian Navy. The two Indonesian men bring the total number of people charged by the AFP with people-smuggling offences since September 2008 to 63.

Therefore, on the question of people smuggling I would simply point to the practical action being engaged in now by our border protection authorities and by our Australian Federal Police.

Can I also therefore on the broader question of action on people smuggling, given that that is the question which has been asked me, refer the Leader of the Opposition also to the 63 arrests so far, the 23 convictions and the 37 who are currently before the courts. He asks also in terms of the effectiveness of government action in relation to people-smuggling activities. I referred before to the disruptions currently being engineered by elements of the Sri Lankan security forces. I would draw to his attention the numbers which apply to other countries in the last 12 months: with the Indonesians, some 89 disruptions involving some 2,221 people, resulting in 28 arrests; with Malaysia, some 15 disruptions involving 552 people, resulting in six arrests; and prior to the news that I gave the House this morning about Sri Lanka, some 15 disruptions already, involving some 260 individuals. These are the practical actions in which we are engaged.

The Leader of the Opposition referred also to the number of vessels. I would refer to the historical record of the Howard government on these questions, and that is that, compared to 2009, which he referred to, I believe, in which some 45 vessels have so far come to Australia, in 2001 there were 44 vessels, in 2000 there were 51 vessels and in 1999 there were 86 vessels. In the year 2001 there were 5,516 individuals on those vessels.

I say to those opposite that it would be very useful, if we engage in this debate about border security, which is an important debate for Australia, that first of all we understand what is happening globally—hence the answer I gave to an earlier question about what is happening around the world coming out of Sri Lanka—and, secondly, the regional cooperation with our partners in the region, the
number of disruptions, the number of convictions, the number of arrests and those currently before the courts. Thirdly, we should also put into context what is happening now against what has happened in the past and the challenges which will continue to arise in the future. Because the facts are these: international people movements are fundamentally shaped by insecurity in the world. We saw this with the events of 2001 and 2003, and we have seen it in the events of 2005 and 2008, directly shaped by civil strife in Sri Lanka and deteriorating security circumstances in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Those are the overall factual circumstances which underpin the Leader of the Opposition’s question.

I would suggest, therefore, if we are serious about embracing these challenges for the future: let us get behind all of our border protection authorities, who are doing a fantastic job day in, day out, bringing these people smugglers to justice—for example, the two that I referred to, who have just been the subject of release by the Australian Federal Police. This is the sort of hardline approach we need with people smugglers. It is exactly the sort of approach this government has been implementing since we came to office and we will continue to do so in the future.

Climate Change

Mr RAGUSE (2.16 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change. Will the minister outline what arguments have been raised against taking action on climate change?

Mr COMBET—Firstly, I think it is important to acknowledge those in the coalition who are supportive of action on climate change, because it is very important for the Australian economy and for our contribution to the battle against climate change and to achieving greenhouse gas emission reductions. However, as has been fairly evident over the last 24 to 48 hours, there are some fairly deep divisions on the other side of politics. We have seen some quite extraordinary scenes, including a struggle for leadership of the Liberal Party over this issue. It is important in this context that we consider some of the arguments that have been mounted against taking action on climate change and that we are clear about what some of these arguments actually involve.

We have heard the argument that this might be some left-wing conspiracy—that the international climate scientists have been engaged in some form of conspiracy that will take us down some left-wing governance path. But an argument has also been advanced, by Lord Monckton, a former adviser to Margaret Thatcher, that the international negotiations are in fact a conspiracy to establish world government. Lord Monckton has argued that a new global treaty on climate change would effectively mean that nation-states sign away their sovereignty to a new, United Nations world government. This has been seriously posited. Lord Monckton has argued that the aim is for the UN to have the power to directly intervene in the financial, economic, tax and environmental affairs of all nations that sign the global agreement. Lord Monckton, only about a month or so ago, I think it was, gave the following warning to American citizens:

… in the next few weeks, unless you stop it, your president will sign your freedom, your democracy, and your prosperity away forever.

So Lord Monckton is positing a fairly serious conspiracy theory. This is a theory that climate change is a plot to destroy national sovereignty and to establish world government. That is essentially his argument.

During the second reading debate on the CPRS legislation, there have been a few ob-
servations about this, and I will just briefly refer to a couple of the issues that have been raised. One contributor indicated that the draft treaty ‘effectively gives complete power over the Australian economy to a committee of unelected UN carbon regulators’. Another contributor in the Senate had this to say:

In cyber Australia right now there is a growing groundswell of disaffected people. I think probably up to a million people have been listening to Lord Monckton …

One other contribution was:

… the aim of the Copenhagen draft treaty is to set up a sort of transnational government on a scale the world has never seen.

Let us just have a look at this contention. What this is seriously arguing is that the majority of world leaders—people such as President Barack Obama; Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany; and Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, amongst others—are in some form of international conspiracy to cede their national sovereignty and establish world government, presumably under the guidance of the UN, and that the vehicle for this great goal is the international negotiations for a treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions! This is the most bizarre, absurd, ridiculous contention that one could imagine being posited in this debate, and yet it gets an airing.

After five weeks of negotiations in good faith, the government yesterday put to the coalition a deal on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and the Leader of the Opposition last night indicated that in his view it is good for jobs and it is good for the environment. The member for Groom, with whom of course Senator Wong and I have had considerable dealings in these negotiations, described the package as an exceptional package. It is a deal that the Business Council of Australia, the Aluminium Council, the Australian Council of Social Service and many environment groups are supporting, and they are calling for its passage through the Senate.

No major modern political party can be held captive by climate change sceptics and conspiracy theorists if it is to retain credibility. It is extremely important for this country that this week we get beyond these issues and ensure the passage of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme through parliament. We need it to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we need it for the national interest and we need it to play a constructive role in international negotiations that will be about combating climate change, not about establishing some new, world government.

Dr STONE (2.22 pm)—My question is addressed to the Attorney-General. I refer the Attorney-General to yesterday’s transportation of another 52 recently intercepted asylum seekers to Christmas Island and to reports that tensions continue to rise at the Christmas Island detention centre due to overcrowding. Will the Attorney-General inform the House how many asylum seekers are now detained in the Christmas Island detention centre; what is the current capacity of the centre; and what contingency plans the government has in place to detain further unauthorised arrivals beyond providing further makeshift accommodation on Christmas Island?

Mr McCLELLAND—I am advised that as at yesterday, as I understand it, there were 1,170 persons in the Christmas Island facility. The facility has capacity for 1,400 people currently but steps are in place to expand capabilities. In particular, 70 demountable buildings are in the process of being transported or erected—I am not currently sure of the precise location of those. They will be erected on land which occupies some 10 hectares, so there is plenty of land. As the Prime
Minister has indicated, the Minister for Immigration has indicated what contingency plans would be available but the current efforts in place—

Dr Stone—is that Darwin?

Mr McCLELLAND—the honourable member interjects as to whether that contingency plan would involve Darwin. The Minister for Immigration is on record as saying that that would be the contingency plan.

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme

Mr DANBY (2.24 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Why is it so important that business and the broader community move forward together to implement the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and build the low-pollution economy of the future?

Mr SWAN—Thank you to the member for Melbourne Ports for his very important question. Back in October 2008 and in February this year Australia faced a grave economic crisis which was forced on us by the global recession. In this parliament we acted decisively and joined with the community to put in place an economic stimulus to support jobs and small business—from the Cape right through to Tasmania, and from coast to coast. History records the fact that it was that stimulus that prevented this country from going into recession. We did this not with the help of the Liberal Party but despite the Liberal Party. They voted against our actions here in the House but thankfully on the second pass the Senate voted for the legislation. Australia was the beneficiary of that vote in the Senate, with lasting benefits for Australia. So many jobs were protected and so many small businesses were preserved, and there was no damage to the skills base or the capital base of our economy.

Now, with just two more days of sittings, we face another moment whose significance is just as great. As the Prime Minister and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change were saying, the CPRS is absolutely vital to a prosperous Australia in a low carbon future. This point has been taken up today by the Business Council of Australia, which issued a media release entitled ‘BCA Welcomes Bipartisan Support’. The release said:

The introduction of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) in Australia is of such fundamental importance and long-term consequences that it requires bipartisan support.

It went on to say:

When passed, the legislation will enable Australian businesses to plan for and make the required decisions about investments to transition Australia to a low emissions economy.

The CPRS is absolutely critical to business certainty, to drive investment in new technologies and in green jobs and, as the Prime Minister pointed out before, to support new jobs—up to 30 times more in the future—in the green sector. That is very important.

If the legislation passes it will send a strong message to all nations that plans for reform in this country have come through despite a global recession, because the temptation in other countries around the world—like it was for the Liberal Party here in February—could well be to do nothing. We need to send a strong message to the world and to everyone in this country that the government is absolutely focused on long-term reform to protect long-term prosperity. No country needs to send that message more than Australia because we are one of the hottest and driest continents. We are hit hardest and fastest by dangerous climate change. That is why we have had another statement today from business, from Heather Ridout, who said:

If we do not put something on the table why should the rest of the world come in and help reduce emissions which will inevitably flow to Australia.

This House, and of course the Senate, should seize this moment. We can work in the na-
tional interest together. Indeed, it is imperative that we do. We can send the message that Australia is up to this challenge because we have shown, through our response to the global recession, that we are up to the challenge of reform, we are up to the challenge of decisive action and we are up to the challenge of protecting our long-term economic interests.

Now is the time for all sides of this parliament—for all parliamentarians in the House and in the Senate—to show some common purpose, to show that we will put our national interest first and to show that we understand the challenges of the future. Our responsibilities to our kids and to our grandkids are what we must follow and live up to. It is a test we cannot afford to fail.

Asylum Seekers

Ms LEY (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his previous answers in this House on the numbers of unauthorised boat arrivals. Could the Prime Minister detail to the House the number of asylum seekers that have arrived by boat in each of the following years: 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Mr Kerr—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder how possibly it would be relevant to the Prime Minister’s responsibility to provide information about periods in which we were not in government.

Mr Rudd—I do admire the member for Farrer’s treatment of chronology! For the actual years that she is talking about, I do not have those figures in front of me—I just do not. But I do happen to have a few other figures for the years that she spoke about, because I thought she might ask this question, which has just been asked in the Senate, which is about arrivals by plane. Let me go to the years that she was just talking about. Total asylum seekers arriving—but we do not want that, do we?

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister of course is extremely powerful but it is not within his gift to change the question to a question about plane arrivals. It was a question about boat people and that is how he should answer it.

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

Mr Rudd—I said in terms of the figures that the honourable member is in search of that I did not have them available to me. But what I do have available, because it has been a matter in the public debate and I have just been informed that it has been raised in the Senate, and obviously the member for Sturt is very sensitive about the thousands who came here—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order, the Prime Minister is a member of the House of Representatives. It is not up to him to answer questions that have been asked in the Senate. If he wants to get a question on people who arrive by plane he should answer a dorothy dixer from his own side.

The SPEAKER—Order, the Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt is warned! I am not sure when he was at the dispatch box the Manager for Opposition Business was actually raising a point of order on relevance, because he referred to the Senate question. But I just say that the Prime Minister is responding to the question. The chair has not got the power to decide the way in which the Prime Minister responds to
questions. With due respect I will assist the Manager of Opposition Business by indicat-
ing to him that I suggest he research the con-
duct of this place during the last parliament.
He will find that the Prime Minister of the
day would say that where terminology, as in
this question, used asylum seekers, unauthor-
ised arrivals, if in fact the response made
reference to those things it fulfilled the rele-
vance standing order, and I am in agreement
with that until the Procedure Committee
gives the House a suggestion about different
standing orders.

Mr Pyne—On the point of order, Mr
Speaker, with great respect to your ruling,
the standing order 104 says that an answer
must be relevant to the question. If you, as
the Speaker, are not prepared to rule that a
question that was asked in the Senate about
boat people arrivals from plane is relevant to
this question, then who is supposed to rule
that it is irrelevant to the question? Who is
supposed to do that if you do not do it?

The SPEAKER—I am not ruling any-
thing about the possibility that you have a
problem about a Senate question. A question
was asked in this place by the member for
Farrer. Included in that question was refer-
ence to unauthorised arrivals and asylum
seekers. I am saying to you—

Mr Snowdon—Shut up, loser!

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister
for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional
Health and Regional Service Delivery is
warned! We will move on. The Prime Minis-
ter has the call.

Mr Rudd—I can understand full well
why the member for Sturt and others would
be sensitive about this. In 2002 total asylum
seekers arriving here from onshore, which
means by means other than boat, were 5,875;
in 2003, 4,439; in 2004, 3,213; in 2005, in
3,203; in 2006, 3,581; in 2007, 4,133—and
you will remember my earlier contribution to
the debate about the increase globally of
push factors affecting all countries—and in
2008, 4,936. You will see that in fact there
has been a significant arrival in this country
of asylum seekers by means other than boat,
and that continued through the period from
2001 on.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I remind, generously,
the member for Sturt that I warned him, be-
cause I have to consider whether a three-day
proposal is really warranted for the trans-
gression.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North
Sydney yet again shows he is not able to get
the pulse of the place. But that is the thing I
actually confront.

Dr Kelly—There is no pulse over there!

White Ribbon Foundation

Mr Dreyfus (2.37 pm)—My question
is to the Prime Minister. What is the signifi-
cance of White Ribbon Day and the work of
White Ribbon Ambassadors in taking action
to stop violence against women in Australia?

Mr Rudd—I thank the honourable
member for his question and for his atten-
dance at today’s event here in Parliament
House. I also thank the Leader of the Oppo-
sition for his attendance and other opposition
members also for their participation. I think I
saw the member for Groom there and other
members from those opposite.

White Ribbon Day is important because it
is about one thing: how do we change Aus-
tralian men’s attitudes on violence towards
women? That is what it is about. This is not a
matter of partisan politics anywhere in this
place. Measures were put in place by the
previous government on this and we are
seeking to continue those and to expand
them into the future. That is because it is a
core priority for the nation that we deal with
the attitudes of men on violence towards women.

In 2003, 10,000 white ribbons were distributed. Just three years later, in 2006, more than 300,000 white ribbons were distributed. And today hundreds of thousands of white ribbons will be worn by men and women across Australia because there are hundreds of thousands of Australians who are prepared to stand up against violence against women. Being a White Ribbon Ambassador is something I consider to be both a great honour and a great responsibility, and I believe I speak on behalf of all members of this place.

Today the results of a survey commissioned by the Australian government on community attitudes to violence against women were released. The National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey 2009 surveyed more than 10,000 Australians, men and women in equal numbers, the first survey taken since 1995. The survey shows that there has been a significant shift in the attitudes and beliefs about violence against women held by Australians. The vast majority of Australians agree that relationships must be respectful and free of violence. But the survey also points to the challenges that we face, and also provides a strong evidence base for the next steps that we must undertake in reducing violence against women. The survey reveals that the two strongest predictors for holding violence-supportive attitudes are being male and having low levels of support for gender equity and equality. This demonstrates very abundantly the significance of White Ribbon Day and the role of White Ribbon Day ambassadors. It is our gender, the Australian male gender, that is responsible; no-one else. It is men who are responsible and we must show leadership in stamping this out in the future.

The Australian government has committed to taking action against violence against women through the development of a national plan to reduce violence against women, to be released next year. Since the government has received the Time for action report prepared by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children in April this year, the government has announced and acted on a $42 million package of immediate responses. This includes the Respectful Relationships program, the second round of which will be starting in schools and communities across the country in the new year.

Action is being taken in communities across the country. A few years ago the Normanton Stingers Indigenous rugby league team started their own community campaign to reduce violence against women. Under the slogan ‘Domestic violence—it’s not our game’ players and coaches agreed to be role models in the community by not engaging in family violence. If they broke this agreement they were banned from games and ultimately dropped from the team. The team joined the Imparja TV to run a local media campaign featuring players and that slogan. There has been a 55 per cent drop, I am advised, in reported cases of domestic violence in Normanton between 2006 and 2007. These are the sorts of practical measures which we are seeking to support across the country. There are many examples just like this where communities are taking the lead, are taking action to reduce violence against women.

Violence against women will only be stopped by positive action by men and women around the country acting to stop that violence. I commend the work of the White Ribbon Foundation and the work of ambassadors right across the country. And I would encourage all men, all honourable men—in which category I place all male members of this House—around the country who have
not yet done so to take the oath, to swear never to commit, never to excuse and never to remain silent about violence against women. I commend the Leader of the Opposition for having taken that oath earlier today; it is an oath I have taken earlier this year myself in Sydney. I commend the actions of all honourable members who took that oath today in the ceremony we attended, and I would encourage that action on the part of all male members of this parliament.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition, on indulgence.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Leader of the Opposition) (2.42 pm)—On indulgence: thank you, Mr Speaker. On behalf of the opposition I thank the Prime Minister for his remarks and we associate ourselves with them. The work of the White Ribbon Foundation is of enormous importance and I join the Prime Minister in calling on all men, in this House and elsewhere, to take that oath and above all to recognise that we will only stamp out violence against women by not pretending that it is a private matter. That phrase ‘I don’t want to get involved’ or ‘It’s just domestic, it’s private, it has got nothing to do with me,’ that allows violence against women and children to go undetected, undisturbed, unpunished. We have to lead by example.

I ask every member in this House just to reflect on this: how often do you see men who treat women in a demeaning way or a violent way have learnt those habits from their own fathers? The reality is that when we as fathers treat women with disrespect, let alone with violence, it is the bad lesson that our children learn, and above all our sons learn. So this is a responsibility for all of us. I cannot commend the work of the White Ribbon Foundation enough. It does great work. And the Prime Minister, who is given to the occasional partisan remark from time to time, today paid respect and acknowledged the work of the coalition government when we were in government in taking action to combat violence against women. This is surely something that unites everybody in this House and should unite all Australians. The only response to violence against women is to stamp it out.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Ley (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. In the intervening period between my last question and now, during which the Prime Minister has been provided with the numbers of unauthorised arrivals by plane, has the Prime Minister received similar advice on arrivals by boat in the years 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007? If the Prime Minister cannot provide the House with this information now, will he undertake to do so by the end of question time?

Mr Rudd—My answer to the honourable member’s question is no, I have not been provided with that information. But she is absolutely right to point out that the number of those seeking exit from countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka went down in the period following 2001. It is a global phenomenon. I have been provided with further figures on arrivals preceding 2001 by means other than boat, because I think it is worthwhile pointing out to the House what happened before 2001. Arrivals in 2001 were 17,882, then it goes 15,547, 13,217—

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Prime Minister was asked if he could provide the figures of unauthorised boat arrivals between 2002 and 2007 and, if he could not, would he confirm that he would do it before the end of question time. The answer is entirely irrelevant to that question.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister has the call.
Mr Rudd—As I said in response to the member for Farrer’s question, obviously in that period—consistent with what happened around the world—the total number of exits from countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka went down. I have referred to those numbers in the House in the last few days. Why those opposite are so uncomfortable about this fact is that in the period they were in office, total arrivals of asylum seekers to Australia, including by air, was: 10,430 in 1996, 10,043 in 1997, 8,192 in 1998 and 13,217 in 1999.

An opposition member—They fixed it!

Mr Rudd—The member up the back says they fixed it. Well if they fixed it in 2001, why did we have 5,875 arrive in 2002 and 4,439 in 2003?

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme

Mr Bradbury (2.47 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. What will the government do to support households as they adjust to a low carbon future?

Ms Macklin—I thank the member for Lindsay for his question, because he knows that we do have to act responsibly and decisively to confront the reality of climate change. That is what we are preparing to do with our Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and we welcome the opposition’s support for that scheme. We recognise that moving to a low carbon economy will have an impact both on individuals and on families. Putting a price on carbon will see some moderate increases in the prices of particular goods and services, and the government has always been upfront with the Australian people about these changes.

As part of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, we will provide low- and middle-income households with compensation. That is a clear part of the scheme that is being proposed. Low-income households will be fully compensated to meet the expected average overall increase in the cost of living due to the CPRS. In particular, 90 per cent of low-income households will receive assistance in excess of 120 per cent of the average overall expected cost of living increase. It is also the case that middle-income households will receive assistance to help them with the increase in the cost of living. Half of all middle-income households will be fully compensated for the expected average overall cost of living increase. Around 97 per cent of middle-income households will receive some direct cash assistance. These are very important commitments we have made to low- and middle-income families and individuals to help them with the impact of the new carbon economy. The assistance package has today been welcomed by the Australian Council of Social Service. It says:

ACOSS welcomes the government’s commitment to provide cash compensation for low income households through the tax and payments systems to cover the expected energy price increases.

To give people an idea of what this means in dollar terms for a family, a household with two children, earning $100,000, would be more than fully compensated. They would have an average cost impact of $976 and would receive compensation of $1,014 in 2012-13. These figures demonstrate the way the system will work. It will be the same for people who are on income support payments, for students and for the unemployed. They will receive an increase of 2½ per cent to their payments over two years, including upfront indexation, to help them with the introduction of the scheme. We will also see similar increases for pensioners, carers, veterans and people with a disability. Those people will receive an increase of $455 if they are single and $343 for each member of a couple. There will be increases to Family
Tax Benefit parts A and B, increases to the low-income tax offset and to the dependency tax offset. All of these changes will make sure that low- and middle-income families and individuals will be helped as we move to a low carbon future.

**Australian Labor Party**

**Mr KEENAN** (2.52 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his commitment of two years and five months ago to sever all ties between the Australian Labor Party and the militant union bosses Kevin Reynolds and Joe McDonald, leaders of the Western Australian branch of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union, and I quote:

... when it comes to the way in which we conduct our political campaigns, we’re not going to obtain campaign finance from such individuals and the parts of the union movement which they represent.

Will the Prime Minister confirm the statement this week by Mr Reynolds that the Western Australian branch of the CFMEU has donated $80,000 a year to the Labor Party since the Prime Minister’s commitment? Will the Prime Minister refund these donations or is this just another Labor broken promise?

**Mr RUDD**—I think the honourable member would be familiar with the fact that the likes of Kevin Reynolds and various other celebrated individuals in that particular union do not necessarily hold either myself or others in this government in the highest regard. Going back to the expulsion of certain individuals from the Australian Labor Party, the news from today—

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister was not asked about his friendship with these individuals. He was asked about whether he would take their money.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Sturt will resume his seat.

**Mr RUDD**—I understand the news from today is that the construction division of the CFMEU has finally seen the light and withdrawn from the Australian Labor Party altogether, which, from my own point of view, is good news all round—in terms of its affiliation, that is. On the question of campaign donations, those questions should be directed to the national secretary of the party. If the honourable member seriously expects the leader of any political party to have available to him details concerning campaign finance, there would be a very interesting set of questions which I would then have directed to the Leader of the Opposition. For example, how much money from the tobacco lobby has been given to the Liberal Party in the last year and the year before that and the year before that? We have been engaged in a debate led by the member for Dickson of late about the future of public health. One of the key elements of that is preventative health strategies and yet we have one participant in the debate, the Liberal Party of Australia, which says, ‘Oh, we can participate in this debate with clean hands,’ while raking in the money from big tobacco on the way through. I would suggest: ‘Physician heal thyself.’

**Climate Change**

**Mr NEUMANN** (2.55 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. How is the government working with farmers, researchers and those people working in the fishery and forestry industries in responding to climate change, and what are the benefits of taking action?

**Mr BURKE**—I thank the honourable member for the question. Following negotiations that have happened at length over some time now between the member for Groom and Minister Wong, we are now in a position where there is a deal, which we all understand...
stand has been agreed to as of last night, to secure the opportunity for Australia to act on climate change. There is no sector of the economy more at risk from climate change than those working in our primary industries. It is important to go through some of the changes that are now there on the table and which, hopefully, in the course of this week will become law within Australia. These go all the way through the production chain, not simply for what happens on farm but for farm inputs through to work on farm and right through to the processing level.

First of all, there is no input which can be a greater burden on farmers than the cost of fuel and the impact that that has. Importantly, under the agreements which have been reached, and which were announced last night, for the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the fuel tax credit from 1 July 2011 through to 30 June 2014 will apply not only to agriculture and fisheries but also to those working in the forestry sector, something very much welcomed by those representatives of the forestry sector who were here in the parliament last night. In agriculture itself, whereas the government’s position initially was for it to be excluded at the moment with a final decision to be made in advance of 2015, the position now is for agricultural emissions to be excluded, and excluded indefinitely. In offsets, it is important that we continue to have a system of trading which is able to be traded internationally. That is why the government continues to argue internationally for the need to separate human activity from natural causes in the international accounting mechanisms. In doing so, though, there is now agreement as to what can happen in the meantime in advance of being able to have a system of international trading in particular for soil carbon. That is why there is now agreement for a voluntary market offset system through the national carbon offset standard. That will allow application for agricultural soils, both in the area of soil carbon and in the area of biochar, also for enhanced forest management and non-forest vegetation to be credited and also for mechanisms in place for credits on regrowth and soil carbon on land which was cleared legally between 1990 and 2008.

On many of these issues part of getting the international accounting working and part of getting these systems working more effectively within Australia is to improve the level of research and development. The government had already increased our commitment to R&D in this space by increasing the commitment that we made at the election from $15 million to $46.2 million. As a result of the agreements with the opposition, there is now another $50 million available for research in this area. In the food-processing area—because of course those working in our primary industries know all too well that costs in food processing are just as likely, and often more likely, to be passed back to the farmer rather than to be passed on to the consumer—there is a dedicated stream within the Climate Change Action Fund of $150 million to assist with work in reducing emissions from waste water, helping with the conversion from coal to natural gas, helping with the potential for renewables. This is in addition to the eligibility that many food processors will have as manufacturers for the transitional programs which are available on electricity prices themselves. There is no sector of the economy, as I said at the beginning, more at risk from climate change. With these amendments they have a system which they can well and truly work within and which allows Australia to take action.

Australian Labor Party

Mr KEENAN (3.00 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is again to the Prime Minister. When the Prime Minister says, as he did in
relation to my previous question, ‘From my perspective, good news all round,’ does he mean that it is good news to see the back of the CFMEU and he gets to keep their money? Or will he instruct the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party to send those donations back?

**Mr Rudd**—Mr Speaker, on the first part of the question—

**Ms Gillard interjecting**—

**The Speaker**—Order!

**Ms Gillard interjecting**—

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**The Speaker**—Order! A number of members on the frontbench on my left and the Deputy Prime Minister are denying the Prime Minister the call!

**Mr Rudd**—This seems to result in considerable animation all round!

**Ms Gillard interjecting**—

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**The Speaker**—Order! The Prime Minister has the call!

**Ms Gillard interjecting**—

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**The Speaker**—Order! The Prime Minister has the call!

**Mr Rudd**—I welcome the question which has been presented on this matter. Firstly, in response to the first part of his question: yes, indeed I do the welcome the fact that, as reported, the construction division of the CFMEU has decided to disaffiliate itself from the Australian Labor Party. I do regard that as good news all round, given my historical views of that division of that union, particularly concerning the activities of certain of its leadership over a long period of time.

Secondly, in relation to all details concerning campaign finance, they are properly directed to the—

**Mr Hockey**—Except tobacco!

**Mr Rudd**—individual office bearers of the political parties concerned. Thirdly, what I have been presented with is a history of those donations by tobacco companies to the Liberal Party. Mr Speaker, it makes very interesting reading.

**The Speaker**—The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The member for North Sydney on a point of order.

**Mr Hockey**—No brown paper bags on our side, mate.

**The Speaker**—Order! The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

**Mr Rudd**—The question did go to the matter of donations. I have indicated how that is dealt with in the normal course of events by the relevant office bearers of political parties. Of course, the honourable member is able to make recourse to the public record of campaign donations to the Australian Labor Party—that is the law in this country. But when it comes to the Liberal Party, can I draw their attention to the fact that—

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The Prime Minister was not asked a general question about donations; he was asked a specific—

**The Speaker**—The member for Sturt will resume his seat. I got the point of order; it is a point of order on relevance. He does not have to argue it. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

**Mr Rudd**—Mr Speaker, just a quick perusal of these numbers: about $1 million has
been given to the Liberal Party by a combination of British American Tobacco and Philip Morris over the years. They come here pretending to have clean hands on such questions. On the question of campaign disclosure and campaign law reform, I would also draw the attention of those opposite to what legislation has also been rejected by the Senate on the part of those opposite. I think they should reflect carefully on their record on these matters.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson on a point of order.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, consistent with your advice a couple of days ago, I just wanted to raise with you the issue of the delay taken for you to ask the Prime Minister to resume his seat. It obviously allows him to get his grab out for the nightly news, which is what he is after.

The SPEAKER—No—

Mr Dutton—I am just questioning why that delay is.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat! I have had referred to me public comment that the member for Dickson has made on Twitter.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney can sit there quietly and he will find out, so then he can twitter that, tweet it or whatever the expression is.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—It’s tweet all right! I simply say to the member for Dickson that, regretfully, I am not a director of a television show, and until his contribution to Twitter was referred to me, I had not understood the series of points of order that have been made about a phenomenon that I think in the proper conduct of this place as a live piece of theatre assists. Having been alerted, I am conscious now that there are several members who believe that we are conducting this place for the TV grabs and that might include people who approach the dispatch box on points of order. The member for Longman has the call.

Climate Change

Mr SULLIVAN (3.06 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Mr SULLIVAN—Mr Speaker, do I have to wait for Tweetle-dee and Tweetle-dumb?

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson is warned! And the member for Longman will go to his question.

Mr SULLIVAN—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. What effect is climate change having on the Antarctic and how does this highlight the need for action to address dangerous climate change?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the member for Longman for his question. He, like many listening, will know that the Antarctic is a really important place because it serves as a laboratory for climate scientists. It is also important because the Southern Ocean, which runs around the Antarctic, is an important driver of the global climate. The recently released Southern Ocean Sentinel report by the Australian Antarctic Division, World Wide Fund and the Australian Climate and Ecosystems CRC stated:

Due to a warming climate, marine ecosystems both near to Antarctica and in the sub-Antarctic are already showing evident effects of impact. They include rising temperatures in the ocean and atmosphere, changes in atmospheric circulation including increasing winds and modified frequency and intensity of storms, increasing levels of ocean acidity and overall reduction in sea ice extent during the last century.
Our scientists looking closely at this issue in the Southern Ocean Sentinel workshop identified a number of ecosystem components that may be vulnerable to ongoing climate change impacts through ocean acidification. They include harvested species like ice fish and krill and also species recovering from overexploitation including whales.

But critically, over the last two years, a number of studies of ice accumulation and loss in both Greenland and Antarctica confirmed that both the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are losing ice mass and contributing to sea level rise at a rate higher than previously estimated. This is important. The evidence for climate change and associated sea level rise is unequivocal. Increased ice melt in Antarctica will further increase the rate of sea level rise. A recent US study by researchers from the University of Texas that use satellite data to estimate Antarctic ice sheet masses confirmed the melting trend but also found that since 2006 ice sheets in coastal regions of east Antarctica may have lost mass too.

This is consistent with the studies by our own Australian Antarctic Division suggesting major glaciers in east Antarctica are shrinking. Some people will have seen the recently released Copenhagen diagnosis concluding that several important aspects of climate change are occurring at the high end or beyond previous expectations. Taking into account Greenland and Antarctic ice shrinkage, the best estimate of the contribution to sea level rise over the last five years is that it has been about three times that previously agreed by the IPCC. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts recently identified that for many locations in Australia where many people live on or near the coast the projected 0.5 metre sea level rise would mean extreme sea level events which previously would have been a one-in-100-year frequency could potentially occur more than once a year by 2100.

This is absolutely vital information for us as we make decisions about dealing with dangerous climate change. One-in-100-year emergencies potentially occurring once a year within the lifetime of our young kids or grandkids, the risks to human health, to houses near the coast, to coastal infrastructure and all the costs that come with that are issues that Australia can and must face up to. There are costs in delay, which is why the government has brought forward the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and the amendments that have been agreed between the government and the opposition must now pass through this parliament as soon as possible. We can see what is happening with our own eyes in Antarctica. We understand how important that is for ourselves and our future and we understand how important the passage of this legislation and finding common cause for the Australian people really is.

**GroceryWatch**

Mr HARTSUYKER (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his election promise to keep grocery prices low by establishing the GroceryWatch website, which was subsequently scrapped at a cost to taxpayers of over $8 million. Hasn’t the Prime Minister failed to deliver on his election promise?

Mr RUDD—On the question of competition within the food retail industry and therefore its impact on grocery prices, the government, through various ministers, has taken a range of measures. First of all, when it comes to foreign investors, for example, into the proper rollout of supermarkets across the country, we have deliberately changed the rules so that those who are seeking to invest are not required to have the construction of a new supermarket on the land they have purchased for the construction of
that supermarket to be done within the normally constrained period of time which existed under the previous foreign investment rule.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—Those opposite interject that foreign competition from other major grocery retailers is somehow irrelevant to the grocery price. Can I suggest to those opposite it is not—it is highly relevant. Therefore, if you go to a range of other measures which concern also the way in which leases et cetera are operated—

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: the GroceryWatch debacle has put no downward pressure on grocery prices—

The Speaker—The member for Cowper will resume his seat. He cannot debate his point of order.

Mr Crean interjecting—

The Speaker—The Minister for Trade—and I this, whilst not encouraging interjections—should refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Mr Rudd—The honourable member asked me a question about competition and prices in the grocery sector and I was responding to his question. Firstly, the government has taken measures to enable foreign owned supermarkets like Aldi and Costco to more easily expand their operations in Australia. After the government made the change I referred to before, Aldi announced its plans to expand and open up a further 500 stores across Australia. If those opposite are suggesting that has no impact on competition within the grocery sector, I do not think they are analysing these facts and figures fairly. That is one measure.

Furthermore, can I also refer the honourable gentleman to what the government has done in relation to unit pricing. It becomes mandatory for major supermarkets from December of this year, and this will empower consumers to make informed choices about supermarket items that constitute the best value for money. On the question of unit pricing, which is a debate that has been going on for years and years and years, they had 12 years to act on this and we have been able to act on that within our first two years in office, and it comes into effect as of December this year. Furthermore, in September the ACCC ended restrictive agreements in leases between shopping centres and Coles and Woolworths which restricted rivals from setting up in shopping centres.

The honourable member asked a question about what in practical terms the government has done about grocery prices and the competition forces which underpin grocery prices out there in the community. There are three practical measures we have undertaken and implemented in our first two years in office contrasted with the 12 years of inaction on this by those opposite when they had ample opportunity to act—ample opportunity to go in there and make a difference—and they did precisely nothing.

Youth Allowance

Ms Jackson (3.15 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 the latest developments in relation to student income support and the impact of these on students?

Ms Gillard—I thank the member for Hasluck for her question. Can I take this opportunity to congratulate her for the work she has done leading a parliamentary committee looking at fair pay and fair treatment of women workers. It has been a very important contribution to that debate and policy development.
I am asked by the member for Hasluck about developments in the Youth Allowance debate. There have been three since question time yesterday. First, the government negotiated with the Greens party and with Senator Xenophon on measures that they sought to improve transition arrangements in Youth Allowance—that is, improved arrangements for students who are currently on a gap year. The government has reached agreement with the Greens party and with Senator Xenophon on those improvements, which are budget neutral. I thank the Greens party and Senator Xenophon for the maturity and skill that they have brought to this debate, and I suspect many Australian students will be thanking them as well.

The second development is that the Senate rejected the coalition’s amendments. Those amendments were always unacceptable because they blew a more than $1 billion hole in the budget. At the same time, they entrenched a system which had been shown to lead to a result where the participation rates of country kids in universities went backwards. That is, it was fiscally irresponsible and grossly unfair, and the Senate has rejected those amendments.

Then, at number 3, in the most churlish and destructive act seen in this parliament in many a long year, despite the Senate repudiation of their amendments, the coalition voted to stop the beneficial amendments that we had agreed with the Greens and Senator Xenophon. They voted to stop a change to make the system easier in transition for students and then engaged in a Senate procedure which effectively blocks the bill.

What have the coalition done through this destructive, churlish act? I can tell you, Mr Speaker, what they have done. They have set this parliament on a course where 150,000 students will miss out on scholarships next year. They have set this parliament on a course where country kids needing to move will not get $4,000 relocation scholarships next year. They have set this parliament on a course where next year a kid in a family earning $44,165 will not get full youth allowance. How mean, how petty, can you be? They have set this parliament on a course where we will not be able to bring the age of independence for getting youth allowance down to 22 years old.

Those who care about education in this country have reacted with absolute fury to this churlish, petulant, destructive act by the coalition. The sector is incredulous that the coalition could be as anti-student as this. In the words of the Australian Technology Network of Universities:

Failure by the Coalition and Family First Senator, Steve Fielding to support this amended legislation is not only bad for the education system in Australia, but it’s bad social policy and is very bad long term economic policy.

The amended Bill would have delivered a level of financial security for those students most in need.

These scholarships help very poor students give more time and attention to their studies by reducing stress and worry, reducing their paid work hours, and increasing their sense of belonging. As a result, these students have attrition rates about 40% lower than other students—the benefit of this scholarship is tangible. These scholarships have been ripped out of the hands of Australian students by the churlish, petulant actions of the Liberal Party. Students have spoken and they have said this:

Last night we thought so many good elements were blocked. A drop in the age of independence to 22, blocked; new personal income test thresh-
olds, blocked; new scholarships, blocked; a system that gets the poorer students to university, blocked. As students have said: 

… what remains is … an inequitable relic of the Howard era.

It is easily rorted by the privileged. It means 30 per cent of gap year students will not return to university. The current system disadvantages poor and regional students the most. The fury in the education sector today because of this petulance and destruction by the coalition is clear.

Despite this destructive act, we are going to give the coalition—the Liberal and National parties—an opportunity to stop this conduct and stop their war against students. Later today, I will reintroduce the bill as amended with the new beneficial provisions agreed by the Greens party and Senator Xenophon. This is now finally decision day for the coalition. There are hundreds of thousands of students who are waiting for their money next year. It will be on the coalition’s head, each and every member, if the hundreds, sometimes thousands, of students in their electorates who would get these new scholarships miss out because of their actions in the Senate. I find it remarkable that anybody who claims to represent an electorate or a state in this parliament could set themselves on such a destructive course. It is time that the coalition actually did something for students instead of continuing their war against students, particularly their war against country kids, who, under their blocking of this legislation, will finish last.

Infrastructure

Mr TRUSS (3.21 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. I refer the minister to his recent list of 32 large-scale projects which he said had been announced, built and completed by Labor since the 2007 election. The list includes the Dynon rail link near the port of Melbourne. I also refer the minister to this April 2006 photograph, taken from the minister’s own website, which has the caption ‘Federal transport minister Warren Truss and Victorian transport minister Peter Batchelor opening the Dynon port rail link’. Minister, isn’t it the case that three-quarters of all of the projects on your list were announced, built or completed under the coalition government? When will you correct the record?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the shadow minister for his question. He indeed is not correct. Earlier this year, I went to the Dynon rail link and opened it with the Australian Rail Track Corporation Chair, Barry Murphy. Last night, we were indeed with the Australian Rail Track Corporation, along with the finance minister, and we had a discussion about the opening of the Dynon rail link and the fact that the ribbon being held by the chair of the ARTC, Barry Murphy, and me across the rail link was not quite long enough and we had to make a decision about who would get hit by the train—me or the chair of the ARTC. The chair of the ARTC got out of the way because he understood that it is that side of politics that likes getting run over by trains, usually self-inflicted.

I am asked about the government’s infrastructure commitments and what we have been doing, and the shadow minister refers to what they have done. That is timely, because he was the minister for transport in the former government and today, indeed, the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics has released a document, ‘Public road related expenditure and revenue in Australia 2009’, that goes through—

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister still has the call.

Mr ALBANESE—that report makes pretty interesting reading, because what it
indicates is that the Howard government, in its last two budgets, slashed road spending by almost 40 per cent.

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is a question about the Dynon rail link. It is not about road expenditure in years gone by.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Nationals will resume his seat. The Leader of the Nationals went on to refer to wider infrastructure spending and also used it in his preamble. The minister has the call.

Mr ALBANESE—I am not surprised they are embarrassed by this, because at the very time that record revenues were coming into Treasury coffers—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance. The minister was asked when he was going to correct the record for having claimed credit for things he had not done. When is he going to answer that specific question?

The SPEAKER—The minister is responding to the question.

Mr ALBANESE—Indeed—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—We are not going to enter into debate about points of order by way of interjections. In fact, I think that, reasonably, if the question indicates something that the minister has disagreement about, the minister is going to go to those points. The minister is responding to the question.

Mr ALBANESE—This report shows that the previous government cut the annual federal roads budget from $4.3 billion in 2005-06 to $2.7 billion in—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will put that photo down.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The reason I was holding that photo is because, when the question was asked by the Leader of the National Party, he used the photo as a prop to illustrate the fact that the question was about a rail link and nothing to do with roads.

The SPEAKER—Whilst the member for Mackellar may not have been satisfied with my response to her point of order, her point of order established that the question went wider than just the Dynon rail matter. The minister has the call.

Mr ALBANESE—they are embarrassed because they cut road funding from $4.3 billion in 2005-06 to $2.7 billion in 2007-08. They are of course the only side of parliament that is talking about cutting infrastructure spending. Indeed, on 7 October Senator Coonan said this:

It’s a very good opportunity for the Government to take a very good look at whether this final part of the stimulus package is really necessary—

that is, the infrastructure spend. The Leader of the Opposition told the Adelaide Advertiser on 20 May:

… everything will have to be reviewed. There’s no question about that …

That is what he had to say about infrastructure spending that is taking place right across the country—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will come back to the question.

Mr ALBANESE—a doubling of the expenditure on the roads and a quadrupling on rail. Indeed, a media release dated 8 April 2009 said the following:

ARTC Chairman, Barry Murphy, joined Minister Albanese at today’s event—

that is, the opening of the Tottenham to Dynon rail link. The ARTC chairman, appointed by you, said this:

“It is symbolic that the Tottenham to Dynon Rail Link be officially opened with the passage of a new Pacific National locomotive, as the upgrade represents another step forward in the resurgence of freight rail in Australia,” said Mr Murphy.
“ARTC is proud to partner with the Rudd Government in breathing new life into freight rail.”

We have breathed new life into freight rail. Perhaps the National Party needs a bit of new life as well.

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table a document from the minister’s website.

Leave not granted.

Welfare Reform

Mr HALE (3.30 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. How is the government reforming the welfare system to support engagement, participation and responsibility?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Solomon for his question and for his support for this very important work which is helping to reform the welfare system. Earlier today I introduced landmark legislation into the House that will see major reforms to our welfare system. There will be a new approach to income management that will see help provided to families and to individuals who are disengaged to make sure that, for those people, we see more welfare payments spent on the essentials of life and, particularly, spent in the interests of children.

These reforms, as the member for Solomon just said, build on the government’s commitment to make sure that we have a welfare system based on the principles of engagement, participation and responsibility. This will be a new national approach to welfare reform. It will start in the Northern Territory from 1 July next year and will be rolled out in urban, regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory. After an evaluation of our experience in the Northern Territory and other places in Australia where we are trialling various forms of welfare conditionality, it will be rolled out in other disadvantaged regions of the country. It will apply to young people who are not engaged in education, training or work; to the long-term unemployed who are seriously disengaged; to parents who fail to show parental responsibility; to families who are referred by child protection authorities to Centrelink to have their welfare payments income managed; and to those vulnerable Australians who have been identified by a Centrelink social worker as being at risk. There will be exemptions in this new approach for those who are engaged in full-time study or training, those who have a history of employment and parents who do demonstrate that they are doing the right thing by their children and making sure they are going to school. There will also be a system of voluntary income management attached to the scheme.

This scheme has had some positive responses already from Toby Hall, for example, from Mission Australia, who has welcomed the approach, saying that a little bit of pressure to move people off benefits is a good thing. There has also been some very positive evidence that income management is in fact working, particularly for families and their children. We have had some significant responses through the wide-ranging consultations that we have recently conducted in the Northern Territory, in which thousands of people participated. They told us loud and clear that they had more money to spend on food, to pay their rent and to buy clothes for the kids and that they were in fact spending less money on alcohol and gambling, for example. Just today there was a piece in the Northern Territory News from the manager of the supermarket at Yirrkala. He said that people at Yirrkala had seen a drop in gambling and less antisocial behaviour and, as he says, he knows firsthand that more money is being spent on essentials. So we have certainly got some very practical evidence to show that this is helpful.
These changes are of course part of a wide range of different approaches to welfare reform that this government has put in place: in the Cape York welfare reform trials, in metropolitan Perth and the Kimberley region and through the school enrolment and attendance reforms in Queensland and the Northern Territory. There are now around 400 people on income management in Western Australia and around 90 in the Cape York welfare reform trial areas. Today’s legislation also very significantly reinstates the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act to the Northern Territory Emergency Response, something that this government has been determined to do.

These are very significant reforms, and we certainly look forward to the opposition’s support for them. I particularly want to show my appreciation to the Northern Territory government. The Chief Minister’s support and assistance in the development of this package has been extremely helpful as the Northern Territory government confronts a very serious level of disadvantage in many parts of the territory.

Economic Competitiveness

Mr KATTER (3.36 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. The Treasurer would be aware that nearly three-quarters of Australia’s exports of coal and base metal and consequently the country’s standard of living depends upon mining. The Treasurer would also be aware that 82 per cent of the world’s copper, 54 per cent of the world’s zinc and 46 per cent of the world’s lead is sourced from countries without an ETS burden and that Australia is in the top quartile of mining cost structures.

In light of the fact that electricity averages 25 per cent of all mining costs and since the proposed increases in electricity prices have been modelled by MMA for Treasury to be over 25½ per cent, and since the CPRS regime is now agreed to by the bulk of the LNP members from Queensland as well as the opposition, could the Treasurer assure the House that he will take action to see that competitively priced renewable energy will come on stream from his and Resources and Energy Minister Ferguson’s transmission line clean energy corridor initiative in Northern Australia?

Finally, can the Treasurer ensure that such actions will be taken as are necessary to ensure that these competitive prices will be passed on to the miners in north-west Queensland? Finally, in light of the government’s and opposition’s CPRS agreement, will the Treasurer open dialogue with Queensland to free up two per cent of the world’s answer: namely, the north-west Queensland uranium reserves, currently embargoed, in an indefensible restraint of trade, by the Queensland government?

The SPEAKER—I remind the member for Kennedy that he can have one finally, not two finallys, but I will allow the question. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Kennedy for his question because he has an intense interest in the future of all of those commodities which are particularly concentrated in the north-west. For that reason I was pleased to visit there some three or four months ago and to meet with all of the industries from the region. I was very pleased to do so with the Queensland Treasurer and, in particular, to discuss with locals the implications of the Sims report, what that means in terms of the supply of power to that region, whether or not there would be a transmission line and how that was being handled by the framework put in place by the Queensland government. I also think it was very productive that, at the roundtable convened only about a month ago here in Canberra with my colleague Minister Ferguson and also the
member for Kennedy, the member for Leichhardt and the member for Dawson, we had a very important discussion about the renewable energy resources in that region and how they might be further developed and, in particular, about the importance of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and the RET that we have put in place to drive investment in that region, most particularly investment in renewable energy.

As the member for Kennedy knows, the process in terms of the future of the supply of power to the region, and whether it is a transmission line that comes from Townsville or it is generated locally, is very much part of a private sector process that the Queensland government is engaged in at the moment. I will certainly be encouraging my Queensland colleagues to facilitate that as quickly as possible, because an enormous amount of investment hangs off the decision that is taken in that process. But there is no doubt that putting in place the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, if it is passed by this House, will be one very important concrete step to facilitate the processes that flow from that, including extracting maximum value from our renewable energy target. So we must get that piece of legislation through the House.

There is an enormous potential in this region. This government, committed to working with the Queensland government, does hold very dear the objectives that he has outlined in his question today. The federal government and the Queensland government will continue to do everything we possibly can to put in place the framework to secure the objectives that the member for Kennedy has at the very core of his question. But the one thing that we need here is the passage of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme through the House to provide the stability and the certainty to essential investment in this very important sector, which goes to the core of our national prosperity and the core of prosperity in so many of our great regions of this country.

Health Services

Ms KING (3.41 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How are the government’s GP superclinics rolling out across the country and how have the superclinics been received?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Ballarat for her question because it gives me the opportunity to report some really good news to the parliament about the rollout of the 31 GP superclinics that were promised at the election with a $275 million commitment. That number has now increased to 36 clinics across the country, with a very enthusiastic reception by, for example, the member for Parkes for his community’s superclinic.

In September I was delighted to be able to go with the member for Ballarat to open the first fully functioning superclinic in Ballan. That Ballan clinic is providing increased GP services and, for the first time ever in the community of Ballan, dental services. I have not had the opportunity to report to the rest of the House or to the Prime Minister, in fact, these new figures that we have in from the first 10 weeks of work at the clinic. Remember that this is a community of around 8,000 to 10,000 people but servicing a much broader community. In the first 10 weeks of the clinic there have been 12,050 presentations—approximately 8,000 GP presentations and 4,000 allied health presentations. I am also pleased to be able to advise the House that a female GP is due to start at the clinic next week, another first for the community of Ballan.

At six other sites—Bendigo, Southern Lake Macquarie, Palmerston, Devonport, Blue Mountains and Warnervale—there are early services being provided to the commu-
nity. I know the member for Bendigo will be particularly pleased that the interim services have commenced in Bendigo, where the existing Monash University primary care centre is transitioning to become the Bendigo GP superclinic. Preparation for construction is underway and the following new activities have been introduced as part of the transition plan. A mental health program with two weekly sessions by mental health nurses and mental health workers for new and existing patients is being provided as part of that early service delivery, and a training program for practice nurses to commence upskilling in chronic disease management and women’s health. At Palmerston, the federal member has been delighted that the after-hours service provided there has seen 9,000 patients visit since it opened last December, with 92 per cent of patients being treated at the clinic, reducing by that significant number those who otherwise have to travel and present at the emergency department at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Twenty-eight contracts have now been signed. Every single contract includes, of course, general practitioners. Ten of these contracts have local divisions of GPs as active partners and 22 of these contracts have university involvement. That means that the superclinics are not only providing vital services, like those in Ballan and Palmerston and increasingly in Bendigo, but are also playing an important role as active participants in training and teaching the next generation of our health professionals, working in communities that have been underserviced for many, many years. This is good news for those communities and shows that our commitment to health, particularly through the GP superclinic strategy, is paying off for those communities. It is good news to report to the House.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.
5,516 out of the total 17,882, or 31 per cent of the total, came by boat; in 2000, 2,939 out of a total 15,447, or 18 per cent of the total, came by boat; in 1999, 3,721 came by boat out of a total 13,217—

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Prime Minister is seeking indulgence to add to an answer, and he was asked about the years 2002 to 2007. He was not asked about—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. The Prime Minister.

Mr Rudd—Obviously, the member for Curtin is, once again, extremely sensitive about these historical facts. In 1999, for her information, there were 3,721 unlawful boat arrivals out of a total number of asylum seekers that year of 13,217, or 28 per cent of the total; in 1998, 200 out of 8,192, or two per cent of the total; in 1997, 339 out of 10,043 total asylum seekers, or three per cent of the total; and, in 1996, 660 unlawful boat arrivals out of a total number of asylum seekers of 10,430, or six per cent of the total.

From putting those numbers together, therefore, I say, as we have said before, that in the period that those opposite were in office nearly 250 boats arrived in Australia, bringing nearly 15,000 individuals. If you look at the total number of asylum seekers over that period of time, it is approaching, onshore and offshore, in excess of 95,000. I would ask those opposite if, in engaging in this debate, they put this into a historical framework and reflect on their own performance in office, it might actually change—

Mr Laming interjecting—

Mr Rudd—the way in which they approach this debate. But of course those members opposite are following the Ronaldson doctrine: you do not get news stories by trying to change perceptions; you get them by reinforcing stereotypes.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Parliamentary Privilege

Mr Hockey (3.49 pm)—Mr Speaker, in one of your con brio statements from the chair during question time, you sought to refer to a tweet by the member for Dickson and engaged in a discussion of sorts about that tweet. I would ask you, Mr Speaker, to investigate whether, once there is an engagement in a discussion about a communication from the chamber, that communication from the chamber, either by a tweet or by email, gets covered by parliamentary privilege?

The Speaker—I would doubt very much that it does, because it is not part of the proceedings of the parliament, and I think that that is fairly clear. The comments that I make that do form part of the procedures would. But I am not going to open the gate to mechanisms being used by putting on record things that are done over information technology by people inside this chamber, to give them any further status. I think that if the member for North Sydney really looked at what I said, con brio or not, I was actually making a comment about proceedings of this place.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Robert—Was that a roll of the eyes, Mr Speaker?

The Speaker—No, no.

Mr Robert—Mr Speaker, I request that you write to the Prime Minister concerning question No. 1031, which has not received a response within the mandatory 60 days.

The Speaker—You do not have the call.

Questions in Writing

Mr Robert (3.51 pm)—Mr Speaker, I request that you write to the Prime Minister with respect to question in writing No. 1031,
as it has now been on the Notice Paper for over 60 days without a response.

The SPEAKER—I will, upon checking that the response has not been received to that question, write to the relevant minister. My reaction before was to comments that not only the member for Fadden made but others made. I did not see him. It is not required that he give me the tip-off that he has a matter for me, and I do not expect that. But I am just indicating to him that I was reacting to things that were happening within the chamber, and his intro was just a little bit unnecessary. But, certainly, if he is aggrieved and has not had a question answered in the required time, I will write to the relevant minister on his behalf.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 14 of 2009-10

The SPEAKER (3.52 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 14 of 2009-10 entitled Agencies’ contract management: Australian Federal Police, AusTrade and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.53 pm)—Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Committee reports—Government responses to parliamentary committee reports—Response to the schedule tabled by the Speaker on 25 June 2009.

IIF Investments Pty Limited, IIF (CM) Investments Pty Limited, IIF BioVentures Pty Limited, IIF Foundation Pty Limited, IIF Neo Pty Limited—Reports for 2008-09.

Sydney Airport Demand Management Act—Quarterly report on movement cap for Sydney airport for the period 1 July to 30 September 2009.

Treaties—

Bilateral—Text, together with national interest analysis—


Agreement between Australia and the Republic of Poland on social security (Warsaw, 7 October 2009).

Second protocol amending the agreement between the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Singapore for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income as amended by the protocol of 16 October 1989, done at Canberra on 8 September 2009.

Multilateral—

Explanatory statements—2009—No. 6—

Amendments to the annex of the protocol of 1997 to amend the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships, 1973, as modified by the protocol of 1978 relating thereto. Text, together with national interest analysis—

Amendments, done at Rome, Italy on 5 December 2008, to Appendices I and II of the convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals of 23 June 1979.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

White Ribbon Day

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (3.54 pm)—by leave—on 25 November 1990, Marc Dutroux walked into a classroom at Ecole Polytechnique, Montreal, Canada. He divided the women and men into two groups and proceeded to shoot dead six women. He then stalked the corridors mur-
dering eight more women before turning his gun on himself.

Shocked by the viciousness of this assault, and the deep and disturbing hatred of women it displayed, a group of Canadian men were moved the following year to speak out and show their opposition to violence against women by wearing a white ribbon. From that modest beginning in 1991, White Ribbon Day has grown to a worldwide movement of men who are ‘not violent, not silent’. In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared 25 November the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the white ribbon has become the symbol of that day.

All Australians have the right to live safe and free from violence, at home and in our community. It is important to work to reduce all types of violence, no matter whom it affects. Domestic violence and sexual assault are two of the most prevalent types of violence and need targeted approaches to change not just attitudes but behaviour. One in three Australian women will report being a victim of physical violence and almost one in five will report being a victim of sexual violence in their lifetime.

Violence against women comes at an enormous economic cost. Recent research shows that each year violence against women costs the nation $13.6 billion. This figure is expected to rise to $15.6 billion by 2021. That economic cost in medical and legal services, time off work and lost productivity is enormous. Incalculable is the emotional damage that cascades down the generations. Domestic violence kills more women under 45 than any other recognised health risk and destroys family and community life. Last month, I received a letter from a woman who told me about the fear that she lives with every day from a verbally aggressive and controlling husband. This woman wrote:

I started off by telling you that I am an intelligent woman. I have two university degrees, I’m confident in myself and secure financially on my own, but I cannot leave this marriage because of the fear. I am so afraid that he will do something to my girls to get back at me and so I stay. I am so afraid that he will somehow get equal time with them and put their lives at risk due to the drinking and reckless behaviour and so I stay. He has a firearm and a dagger and I am so afraid that one day he might be so drunk or so angry that he might just use one on me and so I stay. I feel that by staying I can at least fight and protect my children like any mother would.

We see today the power of the decision of that first group of Canadian men to take a stand against violence against women. Many government and opposition MPs and senators have today taken the opportunity today to stand up and be counted—to swear never to commit violence against women, never to excuse violence against women, and never to remain silent about violence against women. It was wonderful to see the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition come together today and for the Leader of the Opposition to take the oath and for the Prime Minister to restate his commitment to this oath.

Over the last decade, the White Ribbon Foundation in Australia has grown from being a small network of concerned men into a major national organisation with the support of men from sport, politics, business, government and local communities everywhere. I have met with White Ribbon ambassadors and supporters from all over the country—outstanding people like Graham Hoad, Kevin Zibell and Chris Carpenter from the Ballarat White Ribbon Day committee who have been working with local sporting groups and at community events in their region to get the word out that violence against women is not acceptable.
Australians—men and women—are clear that they think violence against women is unacceptable. The latest data shows that 98 per cent of Australians recognise that domestic violence is a crime. Yet, while attitudes have improved, the prevalence of violence continues to be unacceptably high. Even with all our efforts, reports of domestic violence and sexual assault are likely to increase in coming years as women who would once have been part of the silent majority who never report their assault come forward as their confidence in our judicial, policing and support systems improve.

Data from the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey shows that for those women who experienced physical assault in the previous 12 months:
- 31 per cent were attacked by a current or former male partner,
- 28 per cent were attacked by a male family member or friend, and
- 15 per cent were attacked by a male stranger.

The 2006-07 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report found that of the 81 female victims of homicide in that year, 41 died at the hands of their intimate partner—just over half.

There is a very different pattern for male victims of violence. The Personal Safety Survey tells us that 65 per cent of assaults on men were committed by male strangers. Of the 185 male murder victims in 2006-07 year, 13 per cent died at the hands of their intimate partner.

Violence against women is preventable and, while governments and the community have made gains over time in addressing violence against women, clearly there is more to do. In April this year, the Australian government formally accepted *Time for action*, the major report of the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, a non-government advisory body. *Time for action* contains recommendations designed to tackle the unacceptable levels of sexual assault and domestic and family violence in Australia. In direct response to *Time for action*, the Australian government immediately invested $42 million to fund a new package of actions to reduce violence against women.

In 2010 I expect to launch a new national domestic violence and sexual assault telephone and online crisis service. While existing telephone services have helped many people, the Commonwealth is working with the states and territories and the non-government sector to improve and expand the reach of telephone counselling and add online counselling for those who prefer this type of communication. We have also announced $17 million for a behaviour-change campaign to reduce violence against women. We know that most Australians understand that violence against women is a crime. Organisations such as the White Ribbon Foundation have raised awareness in the community and helped develop a strong consensus in Australians. The next step is focus on changing behaviours, actually stopping the violence, or preventing young people from ever using or accepting violence in their intimate relationships.

Our efforts to change violent behaviours have to, in some respects, mirror our efforts to change attitudes to, and incidence of, drink driving. Drink driving kills and maims. As a community we decided to save lives by banning drink driving. We sent a strong message as a community that this behaviour is completely unacceptable. It took a few years before this really sank in, but the days of crawling out of the club and into the car are mostly, thankfully, behind us. That is because people were educated about the harm-
ful effects of drink driving, but also because our policing and our laws sent a strong message that if you do this crime you will be caught and you will be prosecuted. If someone gets caught, we should throw the book at them. Using the public health model that has been successful in reducing drink driving, road deaths have fallen by two-thirds since the late seventies, even though the number of cars on the road has doubled. The NSW police minister believes random breath testing has saved about 20,000 lives in NSW since its introduction.

Similarly with domestic violence and sexual assault, we should throw the book at perpetrators of this crime. But just as importantly we should use persuasion, education, legislation and even incarceration to prevent these crimes from occurring in the first place or re-occurring. Over the next five years we will invest $9.1 million in respectful relationships education.

Children model their behaviour on their family and their peer group. Most young people are fortunate to come from homes where they see respect and love. Most young people want that in their own lives. Respectful relationships education in schools and other settings can give young people the communication skills they need to establish good friendships that evolve as they get older into the skills for loving, caring, equal relationships.

Using peer groups to re-enforce the importance of healthy relationships is particularly powerful with teenagers. Anyone who has had a teenager—or remembers what it was like to be one—will know how important it is to develop a peer group consensus about what types of behaviours are acceptable. That means running programs in schools and places such as youth centres that build the skills young people will draw on all their lives.

Promising respectful relationships programs are currently being tested at 56 sites across Australia at a cost of $2.1 million. The programs currently have participants in most states and territories, and these include NRL youth elite players, university students and school students.

In South Australia, for example, we are funding the evaluation of the Keeping Safe curriculum. This is an excellent curriculum that has strong support but has never been formally evaluated. Anecdotal feedback is that Keeping Safe supports and develops children’s skills to help a friend or tell an adult if they are faced with a problem. In fact I visited a school that had this in the curriculum and it was amazing to see those kids and the way they communicated and supported each other. Students learn that how to recognise abuse, that abuse is wrong, that victims are not to blame and there is action that can be taken to stop violence.

• We will continue to work with sporting codes like the National Rugby League to implement respectful relationships programs. These men are role models and need the skills to conduct respectful relationships with women and one another. In Queensland, for example, the Sex and Ethics program with NRL elite youth uses previous National Rugby League players as educators.

In September the Prime Minister announced a further $1.1 million would be spent on the next round of respectful relationship programs starting next year. This testing phase is designed to give us the information we need to roll out the most successful programs more broadly. We need to build on what works to change attitudes, but, more importantly, to change behaviours. We know that education is important, but legal sanction for wrong behaviour is also critical to our success. We need strong laws and ef-
ffective policing to prevent and punish violence against women.

The government has been working with the states and territories through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to address legal recommendations in *Time for action*, including:

- working toward a national scheme for the registration of domestic and family violence orders;
- improving the uptake of coronial recommendations; and
- identifying the most effective methods to investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases.

Developing a national approach to the registration of domestic violence orders will provide greater protection for women. Many women do not realise they need to register their orders when they move interstate. Yet is it all too easy for men to follow their ex-partners and continue to perpetrate violence. We have asked the Australian Law Reform Commission to work with state and territory law reform commissions to examine the interrelationship of federal and state and territory laws that relate to the safety of women and their children.

As well as providing funding for the immediate package of measures, in the last budget the government committed an additional $195 million over four years to address violence. Of this investment:

- $72 million is being provided for continued funding of the Women’s Program in my portfolio;
- $19.5 million will continue our commitment to training rural and remote practice nurses and Aboriginal health workers;
- An estimated $64 million has been allocated for funding family violence programs in Indigenous communities across the country. Some examples include things like an early intervention and prevention of violence focus through work with men like the Spirited Men’s Project in Murray Bridge in South Australia. Others target Indigenous men leaving correctional services such as the Cross Border NPY Lands Program. These programs address the underlying causes of violence such as drug and alcohol use and the effects of grief and trauma.
- $4 million is provided for the Support for Victims of Trafficking Program.

Because domestic and family violence is the principal cause of homelessness among women and children, the government’s $7.7 billion investment in long-term housing projects and homelessness prevention will help thousands of victims of violence live safely in new emergency accommodation, or long term in social housing. Obviously many victims of violence prefer to stay safely in the family home if they can, particularly to minimise disruption to children, so state and territory governments are also working to implement ‘Safe At Home’ programs like those in Tasmania, the northern suburbs of Melbourne and in the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support’s electorate at Bega. This is being picked up across the nation.

The Safe At Home measures and emergency accommodation are mostly covered in the detailed implementation plans for the Homelessness National Partnership Agreement. Under this partnership, the Australian government will provide $550 million over five years, to be matched by the states and territories, to deliver a new range of services to meet the white paper goals. This total of $1.1 billion for homelessness services and specialist accommodation allows us to take a new approach to homelessness focusing on preventing homelessness and reducing the duration and impact of homelessness and it
will have a significant effect on the 50,000 or so women and children who seek help from Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services each year. Examples of measures in the implementation plans include:

- In New South Wales, over 200 more women and children experiencing domestic and family violence will get help to stabilise their housing in the Illawarra, Western Sydney and Hunter areas through rental subsidies and access to long-term accommodation and support.

- In Victoria, each year a total of 500 children younger than 12 will get specialist help to maintain contact with school and to overcome the trauma of homelessness.

- In Western Australia, women and children who are experiencing domestic and family violence will get help to stay in their housing, where it is safe for them to do so.

- In Tasmania, five new facilities for homeless people will be built over the next two years.

- In the last two years my colleague the Attorney General has provided an additional $54 million for Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Legal Services. These services provide front-line assistance to separating families to help them resolve their disputes, including assistance for women and children.

I am pleased to report to the House that my state and territory colleagues have embraced the need to act to tackle domestic violence and sexual assault. A number have made significant investments in recent years and developed state based plans to tackle violence. The Victorian government has invested over $140 million since 2005 on family violence and sexual assault reform, including, for example, systemic review for family violence deaths driven by the state Coroner. Multidisciplinary centres, piloted in two locations, are an innovative way of responding to sexual offences for adults and children.

In Rockhampton in Queensland, as part of the Queensland government’s recently announced strategy to reduce family violence, they are trialling an enhanced integrated response model for domestic and family violence. This provides case management services for individuals and families, an integrated specialised court program and enhanced legal services.

To ensure that our individual efforts are amplified by cooperation, COAG established a ministerial council in July 2009 to take Time for action to its next step: a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children that all states and territories, as well as the Commonwealth, can sign up to.

Membership of the council includes ministers from different portfolios that have an impact on violence, including housing, community services, women, policing, health, education and Attorneys-General. I would particularly like to acknowledge the work of my co-chair, Attorney General the Hon. Robert McClelland. The Attorney-General is a White Ribbon Ambassador who is using his extensive influence and expertise to push legal improvements for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Our efforts to combat violence have borne fruit in many respects. Community attitudes towards violence have improved. Although too many Australian women experience violence, I have great hope for the future. I believe change is possible. We have already put behind us the notion that domestic violence is private; none of our business.
A few months ago I was talking to school leaders at St Mary’s Cathedral school in my electorate. Because it was so topical at the time, I asked the young men what they thought of the allegations that a group of footballers had raped a woman while on tour in New Zealand. Every single one of those young men was able to see the situation from that girl’s point of view. They made comments like: ‘She must have been terrified,’ and ‘She’s the same age as our friends, and I can imagine how scared she must have been.’ Not one of those boys excused the behaviour of the footballers, although some said it was unfair that one had borne the public shame while his team mates had got off scot-free.

The ability of those young men to imagine sexual assault from the victim’s point of view, and their clear moral code, gave me great hope. I meet men like that—White Ribbon Ambassadors and supporters chief among them—all over the country. Change is possible, but it will take all of us working together, men and women. Congratulations to all the men who showed that leadership today by wearing the white ribbon and by swearing not to commit, condone or be silent about violence against women.

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

Leave granted.

Ms PLIBERSEK—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Indi speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 19 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (4.13 pm)—I am pleased to be able to rise today, the 25th day of November, which is White Ribbon Day. In 1999 the United Nations declared this day to be the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and a white ribbon became its symbol. It is with some sadness that we do have to repeat statistics about violence against women in Australia, because these statistics are quite shocking. We have heard them but we need to repeat them so that they can enter the national consciousness so people can truly appreciate and understand how serious the problem is. We see one in three Australian women experiencing physical violence in their lifetime and one in five women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Even more distressing perhaps is that almost one in four children will witness violence against their mother or stepmother. For children witnessing this sort of violence, we know it does have lifelong harmful effects and impacts on their future relationships.

The consequences of this violence, we know, are not just devastating to the individual, are not just devastating to the children around them, are not just devastating to the family and the extended family, but have very serious economic impacts. Each year it is estimated that violence against women costs $13.6 billion, a figure that unfortunately is expected to rise to $15.6 billion by 2012.

By acknowledging and supporting this day and by wearing a white ribbon, as members of parliament, we show a united front and demonstrate our personal commitment. That is a very powerful symbol to many out there in the community who, in spite of the varied opinions and attitudes they may have toward members of parliament, do look to us to provide some sort of leadership. Our commitment not to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women does give significant encouragement to many organisations out there in every corner of Australia, in capital cities and country towns, who try to raise awareness and discussion about this very important issue. The fact that we here in the parliament, including the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Oppo-
sition, made these important commitments and took an oath sends a powerful symbol to our community. I think that is very important.

Everyone out there—in every corner of Australia, no matter where they are—must know that violence against women is not acceptable in our society. It is not the answer to any problem. We need to empower women so that they know they do not have to suffer this sort of violence in silence. We need to present a clear message to children about what behaviour is not acceptable, under any circumstances, in our society.

I agree with what the Prime Minister said in his speech to the White Ribbon Foundation on 10 September, that this type of crime needs to have a light shone upon it in order to stamp it out. We know that crime and violence against women blossom in the dark when no one mentions it, or we pretend that it is not happening or that it is a private thing. It is easier for many people who are confronted by someone they know who is a victim of violence to pretend that it is not really that bad, or to pretend it is not happening or even that if enough time goes by the problem will go away. But we know that it does not. This sort of violence will continue to flourish unless men in this country acknowledge publicly that there is never any excuse for violence against women and there is never any excuse for ignoring it if we know it is happening.

Eliminating violence against women is an enormous challenge. It is like eliminating crime or getting rid of drug addiction. There will always be a small element within our community that engages in criminal and harmful behaviour. What is so insidious and upsetting about the incidence of violence against women is the widespread nature of it. Right across Australian society, right across every socioeconomic level, right across every ethnic group and right across every demographic you will find an element of violence against women.

I am surprised that the current government has changed the rhetoric on this issue and has established a national council to reduce violence against women and their children. I do not agree with the government choosing to replace the word ‘eliminate’ with ‘reduce’. It is hardly the language of a zero tolerance approach. I wonder what sort of message this sends to perpetrators—that it is okay if you reduce the beatings from four to two a week or to beat a woman occasionally? I am sure this was not the government’s intention. I am not implying that the Minister for Housing or the Prime Minister are tolerant in any way of this type of violence, but I do think we need to be very careful about the language we use. We need to talk about the elimination—in our language and in our speeches—rather than the reduction of violence. We know that language is an extremely powerful tool. There seems to be some anecdotal evidence that some young people feel, at some level, it is okay to hit a woman, particularly if provoked, and there was a recent study of some teenage boys which I found particularly disturbing.

White Ribbon’s website mentions the recent coverage of celebrity couple Rhianna and Chris Brown. The public response to this story demonstrated how young people still tolerate violence in their relationships, or even place blame on the victim. A US poll showed that nearly half of all respondents aged between 12 and 19 thought Rhianna was responsible for the incident. Research closer to home has shown that 29 per cent of young people believe that most physical violence that occurs in dating is because a partner provoked it. So I think that we do need to be very careful about the messages we send out and the language we use. Let us make it clear that violence against women is just not
on. Let us talk about eliminating violence against women, not just reducing it.

This year there is a new and exciting campaign in which men are being asked to swear an oath never to commit, excuse, or stay silent about violence against women. Interested men who may be listening to question time or who may read this speech—or some of my colleagues—may swear this oath on the Net at www.myoath.com.au.

I do applaud the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, who have led by example and sworn the oath. I also applaud the member for Lyne, who recently appealed to male parliamentarians to be outspoken, get active in this campaign or become a White Ribbon ambassador. I congratulate and applaud all those men who have taken up, and those who will take up, the challenge and become White Ribbon ambassadors and those male role models, sportsmen and celebrities who have done so as well. I encourage all of Australia’s 10 million men, whatever their background and whatever their culture, to take up the challenge and swear the oath today to make a commitment to end violence against women.

This oath recognises that strong leadership from men is required to address this serious social issue, as indeed strong male leadership is essential to reform in other areas of society in which women are seeking change and improvement. It also, interestingly enough, underscores the importance of fatherhood and positive male role models for our children. In one of my other capacities, as shadow minister for early childhood education, I know how vitally important the early childhood years are in shaping the values, brains, emotions, character and behaviour of future generations. It is not just about literacy and numeracy or various learning skills; it is about life lessons that young children absorb so completely and that impact on their character for the rest of their life. Respect for women must be part of that early learning experience. As we know—and we see on television the ads about alcohol consumption and its impact on children—children learn by example. I am sure we can all relate as to why we are the way we are and why we do certain things the way we do. We learnt that through the role modelling we had as we were growing up—and children do learn by example.

That is why it is incumbent upon every man in Australia to commit to a zero tolerance approach to violence against women. Young children need to learn clearly and unequivocally that hitting a woman is never right and is never justified—no ifs, buts or maybes. I would like to see a time when the big, tough alpha male has absolute respect for the partner, the woman, that he is with, when to be a real man is not to hit a woman, not to treat her like some animal, but to show respect for another human being. In my opinion, that is part of what being a real man is, to be confident enough about the person you are not to have to physically overpower someone who in most cases is not as physically powerful as you.

For boys in particular the best person to learn this from is their father. Many other men can have a role in being models, but the best person to learn from is their father. It is vital for men to step up to the plate and realise the importance of teaching these life lessons to their sons and reinforcing that attitude by their own example. The social capital that men provide to their families really needs to be properly recognised and valued. I do not think we as a community place enough emphasis on the social capital that both men and women provide in their caregiving and family-building roles. We tend to focus on economic productivity and future economic productive units in society, rather than on social capital. That is something that
governments at all levels need to work towards.

As we know, there are some cultures in which violence against women is not only condoned but sanctioned by the state. The recent highly publicised situation of a Sudanese woman, journalist Lubna Ahmed Hussein, is a case in point. Ms Hussein was jailed for a day in September for violating Sudan’s clothing decency laws by wearing trousers in public. She had faced a punishment of 40 lashes. She was convicted in July. In September a Sudanese court ordered her to pay a fine instead, while 10 of the other 12 women arrested with her at a Khartoum restaurant on 3 July were lashed. After she refused to pay the fine, Ms Hussein served a one-day jail sentence. This type of attitude towards women must never be allowed to pervade society, and where it does in certain cultural pockets we need to help those in those communities to condemn this sort of behaviour and condemn violence against women in no uncertain terms. We should not have lower standards of acceptable behaviour towards women who happen to belong to a subcultural group within Australian society. I know I will probably get criticism for this sort of comment and someone will try and say, ‘There she goes again, making some cheap, hollow, two-dimensional political point. There she goes again; she’s trying to be racist.’ This is not about race; this is about standards: how we treat all women as human beings. We have seen Aboriginal society suffer because we have had lower standards of care and responsibility towards women and children in Aboriginal societies, because we were too afraid to state the obvious. In the same way we cannot be afraid to state the obvious and to provide protection, leadership and guidance to all women in Australia irrespective of their location and irrespective of their particular ethnic background.

I also take this opportunity, on behalf of the opposition, to commend and thank the many dedicated people at the White Ribbon Foundation who are very passionate about this cause, including White Ribbon Day Ambassador Andrew O’Keefe. I also acknowledge the very hard work and dedication of the members of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, led by Libby Lloyd, a very fine woman indeed. Also at this point I join with the minister in congratulating all the men who have taken the oath so far today and have shown their support by wearing a white ribbon. We must eliminate violence against women and children, not just reduce it. Our goal should be to eliminate violence against women and children and anything else below this standard would be failing in our duties and responsibilities to, and leadership of, the Australian people.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Water and Environment Programs

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

The Government’s failure to effectively manage its environment and water programs

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

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

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.30 pm)—This is a government whose environmental programs are in chaos. Let us start with the midyear economic forecast. Carefully tucked away in a footnote on page 31 of the forecast is a small matter, a slight budgetary adjustment for this year, where the $1 billion allo-
icated for pink batts suddenly becomes $2 billion. This is the minister responsible for a $1 billion blow-out in pink batts in one year alone. That is an impressive achievement in accounting. To spend $1 billion on pink batts is extraordinary, but to spend $2 billion, with a $1 billion blow-out, in one year, is a level of fine-grade management which we see coming from the government in its environmental programs.

But it is not just the issue of the pink batts program and a $1 billion blow-out in one year alone. There are the solar programs, which we will deal with shortly, where we have seen the collapse and the caning of the solar homes, the remote solar and the solar schools programs—all from a government that pronounced that it would be the best friend that solar ever had. Three programs axed on three different occasions.

We have also seen the way in which they have spent $650 million, which was brought forward to buy phantom water. That is what my friend the member for Parkes will deal with, the fact that we have a government that is indulging in an orgy of spending on phantom water—air over dams, water which does not exist. It is an extraordinary waste of funding rather than focusing on direct infrastructure spending in rural Australia on fixing up our farms, on replumbing rural Australia, on the once-in-century vision of replumbing our farms and our interconnectors. Whether it is spent on piping or channelling or lining of dams, these are things which would make a real difference and which could save 600 billion litres of water anywhere from the Darling Downs to the Lower Lakes.

And that brings me to the last point, which the member for Mayo will deal with, the fact that we have seen the Lower Lakes neglected on a grand scale. There has been a grand hoax in relation to that which was offered for the Lower Lakes. The reality is that one of Australia’s great wetlands, great migratory bird areas, one of the world’s Ramsar sites, has been neglected and, as the member for Mayo will point out, has led to a devastating environmental impact. Not all is within the government’s hands—not the causes, but the solutions are. So that is what we see today, beginning with a $1 billion pink batts blow-out in one year alone.

I want to turn first to the home installation program and the issue of rorting, the issue of inappropriate action and the way in which we have seen complete negligence in the management of the pink batts program by the government. Let me start with a small example. It is an example which is, shall we say, inconvenient for the government. It is Patricia Andrews. Patricia Andrews was surprised to discover that she had received insulation in her home. She received a letter from the government asking whether or not she was happy with the service that she had had. The only problem was that her home had been demolished. The home was demolished and she had never applied for insulation. More than that, not only was the insulation not delivered, not only was the home demolished, but Patricia Andrews’s home was within the Prime Minister’s electorate. So within a few short kilometres of the Prime Minister’s electorate office, we have an installation rort for insulation which was never delivered in a house which was demolished in the Prime Minister’s own electorate. So this program goes right to the heart of incompetence and mismanagement, not just at ministerial level but at prime ministerial level. There is a simple failure to oversee a program which was badly designed from the outset, which has been modified in response to opposition demands not once, twice, or even three times, but on four different occasions.
So what are the different forms of rorting that we have seen? Firstly, we see the fact that there have been false claims, claims for action which never occurred. There have been claims which are inflated. We produced at this dispatch box only some weeks ago an example of a $1,600 quote and then a second quote for the same apartment in Brisbane for $300. What we see here is a mark-up of over 500 per cent between two different quotes. That is what is occurring in many situations because of a program which was ill-designed and ill-considered.

What we have also seen from the government, beyond false claims, beyond inflated claims, is Google claims. These Google claims are where, in breach of their duties, certain dodgy installers that have been brought in by the promise of free money are making their installation quotes from the sky without ever making on-site inspections. It took us to expose these; it took us to put it to the government; it took us to argue for some months before they finally responded in exactly the way that we said was necessary. But more needs to be done because beyond that you also have the example of flaking. Flaking is where you take ceiling insulation and you cut it in half and you double it. There are many examples. I have had that brought to my attention in my own electorate. All of these have been reported to the government. And finally we have dumping. There are many examples of homeowners who will go into their roof to discover that pink batts or ceiling batts—and do not let me leave any doubt that these are excellent Australian products, fine Australian products that are being misused by dodgy installers brought in by the promise of free money—have simply been dumped, in many cases unwrapped, in the roof, the money has been claimed and the homeowner has been left with the problem. That is a systemic, significant pattern of dodgy practice, of corruption, of rorting and it took extraordinary public pressure, whether it was through Ray Hadley on 2GB, whether it was through stations in Brisbane or Melbourne or Adelaide, to help bring to public light the rorts, the mismanagement, the problems occurring under the program.

I want to go to something more serious now, the problem of ceiling fires. These are not examples which we have made up. I want to read from a release by the New South Wales government’s Steve Whan, the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Small Business. I quote from his release dated 18 November 2009—the member for Dickson’s birthday:

The Minister for Emergency Services Steve Whan today urged homeowners to check that ceiling insulation had been installed properly following a spate of 15 fires involving ceiling insulation over the past three weeks.

Mr Whan said that these 15 fires brought the total for the year to 49, compared to 25 in 2008. So 15 ceiling fires in three weeks linked not by us but by the New South Wales Minister for Emergency Services to insulation and a doubling of ceiling fires in one state, in one year not yet completed, again linked not by us but by a Labor government state minister. We also see that in Western Australia the Department of Commerce issued a release noting:

This increase in demand for roof insulation due to the subsidy may attract inexperienced installers to the industry and there is a danger if the product is not being installed according to our strict safety guidelines.

Similarly the South Australian Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gail Gago:

The main safety issues appear to be with the incorrect installation of loose fill or blow-in insulation, however, any type of insulation installed too close or covering electrical devices, such as down lights and fans, can cause them to overheat and start a fire.
What we have seen is state ministers around the country warning of fires under the government’s insulation program, not us. They are not our views; they are the state ministers’ views. Two out of the three were from state Labor governments.

I now turn to the most serious incidents under the Home Insulation Program and this is why there needs to be an urgent Auditor-General’s inquiry and why there can be no reason, I say respectfully to the minister, for ignoring or avoiding such an inquiry. It is also why the government must make all details of the Home Insulation Program—what the minister was warned of and when he was warned by different authorities—available to an inquiry and why there must be new training standards by the end of this week. What we have seen, very sadly and tragically, are three deaths of young installers involved in ceiling insulation.

Mr Garrett—Be very careful.

Mr HUNT—I will be very careful, Minister. What we have seen from these three deaths is that all three have been involved in roofs over recent months. We say there must be a direct and specific inquiry into how such a pattern of deaths has occurred for young installers who have not been properly trained and who had not had experience in these roofs. I do note that there were specific warnings of electrocutions to the government by different agencies. Two agencies have provided written material to us: EE-Oz, the electrical installers, and the National Electrical and Communications Association. A letter to the minister on 9 March 2009 from the National Electrical and Communications Association says:

There are inherent dangers when installed inappropriately near electrical equipment and cables. Whilst not the only safety issue, by far the most dangerous is the risk of fire associated with installing thermal insulation.

I note that, having met with the National Electrical and Communications Association today, they have again repeated their point that the safety standards need to be upgraded.

These are three tragic incidents which should be investigated, because they are part of a pattern, because they are part of a process about which warnings were given and because they are part of a process which is ongoing. We do not know absolutely what the causes of these were, but we do know that there have been two deaths through electrocution of inexperienced workers—young men who have gone into the roofs to receive money under the Home Insulation Program. We do know there was a death through heat exhaustion of another young man, again inexperienced and operating under the program.

It is incumbent on the government—and I say this with the greatest respect—to launch an inquiry into this pattern. The electrocutions are sadly part of a grouping of eight or nine electrocutions, of which we are aware. These are not one-offs; this is a significant pattern with the most tragic circumstances. The advice I had just today from the National Electrical and Communications Association is that they believe more fires are set to occur, potentially with tragic consequences, and that more incidents are set to occur. The reason is the training standards are not adequate, according to the National Electrical and Communications Association. This is what they said in their media release of a month ago, 23 November:

NECA warns of fire and electrocution dangers when installing insulation.

These are the most serious matters of public administration. When we embark upon a program we take responsibility for the consequences. I say to the minister, now that we have had not one, not two but three of the
most tragic outcomes, that the government must organise, initiate or instigate a full national inquiry into these tragedies and other tragedies under the insulation program. There can be no reason, no justification and no excuse. That is what has occurred and this is the time to agree to an inquiry. If you agree to that inquiry, you will have our full support. If the government does not agree, it must explain why this pattern of tragedy is not connected and why it has assumed away the responsibility for oversight of its programs. If the government does not do this, it will be held responsible.

We started with the issues of rorting. It is absolutely clear that all Australians know that a billion dollar blowout in one year is accompanied by flagrant rorting. Whether it is false quoting, the demolished house in the Prime Minister’s own electorate, overquoting—a 500 per cent overquote on one occasion—Google quoting from the sky, flaking—cutting the bats in half by severing them horizontally down the middle—or simply dumping the batts, we know this is a program which is rife with rorts. There are good installers who have high standing in the industry, but they have not been the problem. It is the fly-by-nighters who have come in and have not been regulated properly. Then we had the fires—15 in three weeks, according to the New South Wales minister; a doubling in New South Wales over the course of this year—and now we have the tragedies. I say to the minister: it is time for an inquiry.

(Time expired)

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts) (4.45 pm)—I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate this matter of public importance in the House because it gives me the opportunity to place on the record a number of measures that the government have in place in relation to the delivery of the Home Insulation Program and our energy efficiency programs generally and also to make absolutely clear the way in which, from day one, we have approached issues of safety, training and effective delivery for the Home Insulation Program.

The member for Flinders is a little late. That is really the subtext of the debate we are having here on a Wednesday. He has been running around the place trying to whip up concern about matters where the government has already responded and taken action. He made a call some weeks ago for an Auditor-General inquiry, knowing full well that the Auditor-General has communicated both to him and to me that any aspects of this program will be considered in the ordinary course of business—and that is as it should be. The member for Flinders raises the issue of the demolished house in the Prime Minister’s electorate and draws the longest bow to suggest that in some way the Prime Minister is responsible for what happened in this instance. What he neglected to say was that immediate action was taken on that case, that the installer was deregistered and that a comprehensive fraud investigation is well underway. We have said time and time again that in any instance of this kind—and there are remarkably few under a program which has been incredibly successful—the government will not hesitate to remove any installer of insulation from the register and take legal action, if appropriate, should they fail to comply with the program guidelines.

The shadow minister raises the reports of fires. These are tragic incidences—there is no doubt about that—and our thoughts are with the families of those involved. These cases, and there are only a small number of them, have all been under investigation and some that were mentioned by the member for Flinders are still under investigation at this point. I have asked my department, as I do in all cases, to work very closely with the state safety authorities, who have responsibility
particularly for occupational health and safety matters that relate to these activities. I cannot stress strongly enough that installer and householder safety is an absolute priority under the government’s Home Insulation Program. All reports of safety breaches are dealt with under the program’s audit and compliance guidelines. In relation to one of these unfortunate and tragic deaths, I have been advised that hazards and control measures, including for heat stress, relating to hot working environments are covered off in the mandatory occupational health and safety training and relevant materials. Under this program, all installers—everybody installing insulation—must complete this occupational health and safety training as a requirement of the program’s guidelines.

It is a fact that, until such time that the government brought forward the Home Insulation Program, there was no nationally accredited training in place at all and there now is nationally accredited training in place. It is the case that installers must comply with all relevant state and territory laws as well as complying with the guidelines, which have been strengthened by this government. In relation to these matters, particularly training, there are industry skills councils considering issues around training. If there are any other matters that we need to consider—any recommendations that come forward as a matter of urgency—I will not hesitate to further boost training requirements and safety standards if that is required.

This is a very, very successful program. This is a program that has completely exceeded the expectations of all those who made commentary about it in the first instance. Let us remember that it was the opposition, led by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Turnbull, with the shadow Treasurer and the member for Flinders, who specifically opposed in the parliament that the government should bring forward stimulus measures which would deal with the global financial crisis and provide an opportunity to stimulate manufacturing activity and, through the Home Insulation Program, put in place the largest and most comprehensive energy efficiency program that this country has ever seen. That is what we are dealing with today, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I say through you that since February this year ceiling insulation has been installed in over 700,000 households in this country. That is 700,000 households that have had the opportunity to reduce their energy costs, to contain greenhouse gas pollution and to take the benefit of ceiling insulation, which will in the long term provide not only ongoing energy savings but additional amenity. It is improving the infrastructure of people’s houses as well, and that is why it has been so strongly supported by the Australian public. It is a fact that over the last nine months almost one in 10 Australian homes has been made more energy efficient.

When the member for Flinders came in here he referred to chaos. He talked about the chaos of a program which has seen one of the most significant and consistent deployments of energy efficiency that we have ever witnessed, where we have a remarkably small percentage of complaints and where we have in place a series of measures around compliance and auditing to ensure that each and every complaint is followed through and, if there are breaches of guidelines or safety regulations, they are dealt with as a matter of urgency.

This is a program that is on its way to putting ceiling insulation in the homes of one million Australians; this is a program that is delivering right along the manufacturing and distribution chain; this is a program that is employing many Australians; and it is a program that is strongly and fully supported by the industry. I have regular stakeholder meetings with the industry. I value those meetings
and I value the advice that they provide for us and the way in which they have strongly supported what the government has brought forward.

The member for Flinders started talking about chaos in here. The fact is we have never seen more chaos, at least not that I am aware of, in any setting of any parliament in this country than we have seen in this House over the last two days on the matter of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and the tenure of the Leader of the Opposition. You want to talk about chaos in here? Just turn on Sky television and watch it minute by minute as these headless chooks try and get their act together and figure out what they are going to do about one of the most important pieces of legislation to come through this parliament. Even today, we had a spill on at one o’clock, one hour before question time. Yesterday, question time nearly did not happen when it was meant to, because of the chaos which was being produced by the opposition, who were in complete disarray. The definition of chaos: the opposition parties in this parliament over the last 48 hours.

Success normally has many parents. There are normally many who claim the parentage of success. But, in this case, the opposition are willing on the failure. The opposition are willing on the failure because they hate this program. They opposed it from day one and they have been attacking it ever since.

The member opposite, the member for Flinders, knows very well that it was the Leader of the Opposition himself who proposed at one point, we understand, that we should in fact think about putting ceiling insulation in the ceilings of Australian households, and it was the now departed member for Higgins, the former Treasurer, who knocked him over, just like he was knocked over in many other instances with the submissions that he brought forward to the cabinet in the Howard era. So here is the irony upon irony. Here we have a program which has satisfied the requirements that we put in place for providing proper fiscal stimulus to keep the economy going in the face of the global financial crisis, to provide Australians with the opportunity for meaningful and good employment, to make sure that there was plenty of investment down the supply chain and to start on the business of serious investment in energy efficiency—and it is serious investment. Those opposite, the Liberal-National Party coalition, opposed it from day one and they have been attacking it ever since.

The proof is in the pudding. This is the most successful energy efficiency program Australia has ever seen. It will continue to deliver that which we set out to deliver at the time: employment for Australians, local manufacturing jobs, distribution jobs, jobs along the supply chain and reduced energy costs for Australians. Everyone listening knows that energy bills are an important thing that they have to deal with in their lives. Insulation reduces greenhouse gas emissions and makes their homes more comfortable. You do not necessarily have to get
the big aircon unit in when you have insulation in your ceiling; you do not necessarily have to have the heater going all through winter when you have insulation in your ceiling; and it is in your ceiling for longer than the lifetime of this program—it is in your ceiling for 10, 20 and 30 years. That is what it does to the housing stock of this country.

The fact is that this government has produced one of the most significant additions to housing infrastructure that we have seen in this country.

*Mr Hunt interjecting—*

*Mrs Hull—That’s if it’s in your ceiling!*

*Mr GARRETT—I can hear the rattling of the interventions from those opposite, but I do want to go on and say that it is not only about the Home Insulation Program, because we take energy efficiency seriously—something that the coalition never did. I struggle to remember a single significant initiative on energy efficiency that came through when we were in opposition. I genuinely struggle to remember it. Do you know why I struggle to remember it? Because there weren’t any. There was not a single one. You were not paying attention because there was not a single one.*

*Mrs Hull interjecting—*

*Mrs Hull interjecting—*

*Mrs Hull interjecting—*

*Mr GARRETT—I take intervention on light bulbs—light bulbs and light bulbs only.*

*The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georgantas)—Order! I ask members to stop interjecting. Other members were heard in silence. I expect all members to be heard in silence.*

*Mr GARRETT—It was one measure over 12 years, which this government has accelerated. Look at what we have done since we got into office and look at the announcement that was made today. Today I was pleased to be at the YWCA in Canberra, with Clare Martin from ACOSS, launching Green Start. What a fantastic program, with $130 million to help improve the energy and water efficiency of low-income and disadvantaged households. We recognise that low-income and disadvantaged households have additional pressures in terms of the cost of living and we know that provision of accurate information, assistance and assessment of the conditions of their homes and the provision of services, or even information, to enable them to take the necessary steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions will be very much welcomed. I look forward to hearing from those who will tender for that program, because I know that we will be providing vulnerable households with free home energy and water assessments, linking that to various government energy and water efficiency rebates and programs, including the Home Insulation Program, and providing installation of practical, low-cost energy and water efficiency improvements. And then there is Green Loans—another innovative and excellently supported program by the Rudd government on energy efficiency—empowering Australians to take the action that they want to take to reduce their energy costs and play a role in reducing and containing greenhouse gas emissions.*

*At the end of the day, this government is absolutely serious about energy efficiency. By rolling out the largest and most comprehensive energy efficiency program that this country has ever seen, we are delivering on our election commitments, we are providing Australians with the opportunity for increased employment, we are delivering to Australian households the opportunity to reduce their energy costs and to contain greenhouse gas emissions and we are showing that we know what it takes in this country in 2009 to take real and practical action on dealing with dangerous climate change.*
Mr Deputy Speaker, this is in fact a matter of public importance, and I commend our record to you.

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (5.00 pm)—I commend the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts for his performance. The trouble is his performance is far more appropriate for the other part of his portfolio, the arts, than it is for the environment part. The amount of drama, illusion and theatre involved in his performance and his total removal from reality were quite compelling, so I compliment the minister on his great artistic performance.

What we are seeing here is a great disconnect. I am totally amazed that day after day we see ministers on the other side of this place stand up and say that black is white—sometimes with a bit of flair, as the minister did, and sometimes with a straight face. It is absolutely amazing. I am speaking on water, but I will touch first on home insulation, because that scheme has given me, as a local member of parliament, a lot of work. In the towns of my electorate the citizens are being preyed upon. The mainly elderly have been approached door to door with an offer too good to refuse: the government will pay for it all; if your roof is a bit bigger than the average, we will need just $200 or $300 more and we will do it. When these elderly people have had a younger relative or a neighbour come and inspect the work, they find that the work has not been done, except for the bit around the manhole that you can see. Anyone who knows anything about home insulation knows that unless it is installed properly—unless the entire area is covered—it will have no effect. So this is indeed a rort. If the minister thinks this program is well regarded in the community, he is delusional.

The community sees it for what it is. They see that it is a scheme with the best of intentions that is totally mismanaged, is totally rorted and will not deliver what it was meant to.

Today I want to speak about water—the government’s programs on water and its attitude to water and the environment, particularly the environment west of the range. When it comes to water this government appears to have only one policy, and that is to buy it—to remove water from the basin. At the moment the problem is that they are buying air. They have spent hundreds of millions of dollars but have only bought air.

Ms Rishworth interjecting—

Mr COULTON—The member from Adelaide over here might like to reflect on this and she might learn a little about what is actually happening in regional Australia and in the Murray-Darling system. Last week in here we spoke on a bill that required another $650 million to cover the shortfalls in the government’s misjudged, misguided and mismanaged water buybacks.

This government has no commitment to improving the efficiency of water delivery and has no commitment to saving. Indeed, some of the foolish decisions made by this government are breathtaking in their stupidity. There is no greater example of this than the purchase of Toorale Station at Bourke—one of the landmark agricultural properties in western New South Wales, a producer of food and fibre not only for the citizens of Australia but for people all around the world, an employer of some 100 people, and the major taxpayer and ratepayer in the Bourke shire. This property was purchased without a word of consultation, and it was purchased because of a small amount of water. I would like to ask some of the members from further down the stream about that, and I will make an offer to my good colleague from Adelaide here. I will supply her with a digital camera. She can go out and stand on the banks of the Murray River. If she takes a photo when that
water from Toorale Station reaches the Murray, I will come in here and apologise. But it is not going to happen. That water may, at best, make it to Menindee, where it will evaporate. A couple of penguins might get a couple of days benefit from it, but that is it.

Mr Byrne—Penguins in Menindee?

Mr COULTON—Sorry; I meant the other fellas, with the big beaks—pelicans. I am from inland, and I get my waterbirds mixed up. It is all this discussion of global warming and climate change. I have got penguins coming up the Murray-Darling now. But the pelicans at the Menindee Lakes, for a couple of days, will appreciate the water from Toorale Station. The community of Bourke has been decimated for now and evermore. Toorale is locked up. It is a national park. The feral pigs will appreciate it. The feral pigs will have a field day with what is a landmark property in western New South Wales.

The other major purchase this government has made has been the purchase from the Twynam Agricultural Group. If anyone saw a good deal coming to them, it was the Twynam Agricultural Group. A massive sale of water, something they did not actually have, was made to this government. But what is going to happen when the seasons do return and when the dams do get water in them? The town of Collarenebri, which relies very strongly on the production and employment of Collymongle Station, will be in a permanent drought—a drought that has not been induced by the environment but by this government.

You might think that the decimation of the community of Collarenebri is an accidental thing, that it is a bypass, that it is an unthought of consequence. But tie this in with the overspend of $1.7 billion on the Minister for Education’s Building the Education Revolution and ask: where did the savings come from for that $1.7 billion? I can tell you where they came from—from places like Collarenebri Central School. Nearly 90 per cent of its students are Aboriginal students and its science lab is a demountable that has been there for 30 years. It is in desperate need. But the only chance those kids have got of any employment in Collarenebri, now that the major employer in the town has been closed down by the government, is to get a decent education so that they can go off and do something else. But the government has made that so much harder. I would like to think that the decimation of Collarenebri and Mungindi is an unforeseen consequence, but when you tie it in with other government programs I wonder if there is not a more sinister scheme behind this.

The other thing is the decimation of Landcare. Caring for Country, something that Minister Burke comes in here and trumpets time after time, has been an unmitigated disaster for the environment of Australia. In the last 12 months I have travelled a large part of this country speaking with natural resource management groups. Without exception, whether it is a group from Cape York or from Gippsland, they are fed up with this government and its gutting of Caring for Country and Landcare. That is one of the largest volunteer organisations in Australia: a million volunteers who do things for nothing because of their commitment and their love of the environment. They go out on weekends to stabilise creek banks, plant trees, combat erosion and put in programs to stop salinity. All they need is a bit of back-up support from the government, and that has been removed. The funding has been cut by 40 per cent in the last 12 months—everywhere in New South Wales except for one place. Can you guess which catchment management authority got an increase in their funding last year?
Mr Hartsuyker—Sydney!

Mr COULTON—Yes, the Sydney Basin got an increase. I think the government needs to rethink this. When you have got a million volunteers who are prepared to spend their spare time improving the environment in which they live, I would have thought that they would be encouraged, not pitted against state organisations; not expected to put in large proposals that they do not have the time or the skills to do, so that after several attempts to get a tiny crumb of funding they give up and go home in disgust as large, quasi state government organisations get money to look at issues in the Sydney Basin or up on the east coast of Queensland. This government’s approach to the environment, to water and to the people of regional Australia is an absolute disgrace. (Time expired)

Dr KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water) (5.10 pm)—It never ceases to amaze me the subject matter that is raised in MPIs by the coalition. They could not possibly choose subjects that could more starkly highlight the failures of the Howard government and the successes of the Rudd Labor government, and the water and environment areas are probably two of the most prominent of those. When we look back on those 12 Rip van Winkle years of the Howard government, we think about what was not done about climate change, what was not done about infrastructure, what was not done about schools and what was not done about water. I think there was some sharpening of the mind as we came close to the 2007 election about the need to address the water issue and the cries for help from the Murray-Darling Basin down to Adelaide. That was when they finally realised this was going to be an election issue, so we had the incredible rollout of the Living Murray program—and we know the public administration failures that were associated with the rapidity of that announcement.

But I do not want to talk about this from a partisan point of view. I think I should let an objective observer speak about the failures of the Howard government on water. In particular, a fellow by the name of John Quiggan, who is an ARC Federation Fellow at the University of Queensland, wrote an article in the Australian Financial Review, a notable journal, on 4 June 2008. He said:

Until recently, despite talk of the state obstructionism, the big failures in water policy were at the federal level. Economists and environmentalists have long agreed that unless governments are willing to buy back some of the water rights that were created on a lavish scale, then given away over the 20th century, there is no real hope for a solution to the problems.

He went on to say:

The Howard government, and particularly Malcolm Turnbull as Minister for Environment and Water Resources, talked a good game, but failed to deliver significant progress. The Living Murray Program and the National Water Initiative went nowhere. Howard’s final venture, the National Plan for Water Security announced in early 2007 with no apparent input from Turnbull, was a big step backwards. The $10 billion allocation (most … deferred far into the future) concealed a decision to do nothing about buying back water for fear of offending the National Party.

And what did Mr Quiggan conclude about what has happened since then? He said:

But water policy is one area where the Rudd government has moved beyond review and consultation and gone on to effective action. The government’s purchase of water from Toorale Station and the Twyman Agricultural Group—which we have just heard reference to—in NSW with entitlements totalling nearly 300 gigalitres has the potential to secure more water for the environment, and for flows downstream to South Australia, than all the initiatives of the Howard era put together, and at significantly lower cost.
Those are the words of Mr Quiggan in the *Australian Financial Review*.

In my own area I deal a lot with groundwater issues and I am proud to be involved with the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative. Just yesterday morning I was at a conference on groundwater, the National Water Commission’s Groundwater Forum. This was another area of neglect by the Howard government. What we saw highlighted in the Australian Water Resources Assessment 2000 was that no nationally agreed, standardised method for calculating and reporting sustainable yield was available for groundwater. That was highlighted in the year 2000, so there were seven years of inaction after that. Also, the National Water Commission recognised in 2007 that groundwater had been the poor cousin in water issues, notwithstanding that groundwater is 30 per cent of our total consumption.

So, what did the Rudd Labor government do? We established the National Groundwater Action Plan. We are proud to say that we have approved $105 million for the commission’s National Groundwater Action Plan, which is being funded under the $250 million Raising National Water Standards Program. This is going to address groundwater knowledge gaps and progress groundwater reforms agreed to under the National Water Initiative. Under that plan, there are three major components: the National Groundwater Assessment Initiative, the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training, and a knowledge and capacity-building component to communicate research results. It was wonderful to see the 125 experts at that conference, finally helping us to fill the gap in our knowledge about groundwater. We need to be able to capture that knowledge. We need to be able to regulate groundwater more effectively as part of our overall management of water.

But the Rudd Labor government has been very busy in many other areas in relation to water. We have moved ahead rapidly with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the appointment of its head, Mr Taylor. The proceedings of the planning phases, moving to the final Murray-Darling Basin Plan, are going ahead well, with consultations throughout the community in the basin. That plan should be completed by 2011. This will finally establish an enforceable, scientifically informed limit on the amount of water that can be taken from rivers and groundwater systems in the basin.

Part of filling that knowledge gap that I mentioned also involves us putting $450 million into establishing, with the Bureau of Meteorology, exactly what water is coming into the system. The problem that we have in the basin largely relates to overallocation, which suggests that we released water we did not know we had—we did not know the amount of water that could be released to licence holders. So overallocation has been a problem, and it needs to be solved by knowledge.

We have also, through our purchases, seen a great amount of water going back into the Murray-Darling Basin, not just to move down through the basin to South Australia but also for the very important environmental assets and values that exist throughout the basin. There were many wetlands and lakes that needed assistance, including Ramsar registered wetlands that were dying. One of the great things that I have seen in this job, when I accompanied the minister for water, Senator Wong, down through the Murray-Darling Basin, was the Hattah lakes. This is an area that had been dry, and the birds had gone. The purchase of our environmental water has enabled those wetlands to be rejuvenated and birds to return—and, in their wake, a large number of tourists. So we can see the effects of that on the ground.
There are many other projects, and it would take me too long to go to them all, but I will say that a number of them are having an immediate effect. The introduction of water market rules and termination rules is having considerable benefits for irrigation farmers through the basin. It is leading to more efficient use of water and it is establishing a dynamic that is improving productivity.

One of the programs I administer, the National Rainwater and Greywater Initiative, which is allocated $205.6 million, has received 5,700 applications for the installation of water tanks, and 3,445 rebates had been paid as at 10 November this year. Some 43 surf-lifesaving clubs have now also applied to install rainwater tanks or water efficient devices, and grants have been approved to 38 of those.

We have assisted small-block irrigators in our exit program, people who are crying out for assistance and are in financial distress. We have provided irrigation exit grants of up to $150,000. We are providing $10,000 for advice and retraining, and $20,000 for the removal of permanent plantings to allow more flexible farming to take place on those properties, and there is production related infrastructure funding of up to $10,000 offered in the original package.

Through our National Urban Water and Desalination Plan, we have committed $30.2 million for the Glenelg to Adelaide Park Lands Recycled Water Project, which is due for completion in early 2010 and will deliver 5.5 gigalitres of water each year. There is $20 million for the Barwon-Shell water recycling project in Geelong, which will deliver two billion litres of water each year at the Shell Australia plant in Geelong. There is $328 million to support the construction of the Adelaide desalination plant, delivering 100 billion litres of drinking water annually and reducing Adelaide’s reliance on the River Murray. There is $20 million for Murdoch University to host the National Centre of Excellence in Desalination, in Perth, and $20 million for the Western Corridor Recycled Water company to host the National Centre of Excellence in Water Recycling, in Brisbane. There is $86 million—out of a total $200 million allocated to stormwater projects—for 13 stormwater harvesting and reuse projects, with the potential to deliver an estimated nine billion litres per year, in Brisbane, Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Adelaide. Through our National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns, 19 projects identified as commitments by Labor during the election have come to fruition or have started, totalling $101.2 million.

We are also doing a great deal on on-farm irrigation infrastructure, including providing $4.4 billion out of the $5.8 billion allocated to our Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure program, $191.4 million of which has been expended to date. I do not have time to go through those projects in detail, but they include $21.7 million for the Gwydir Valley pilot project.—(Time expired)

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (5.20 pm)—I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this matter of public importance. I would actually be happy to move an extension of time for the Parliamentary Secretary for Water so he could tell us about those on-farm irrigation investments, because we have not seen them. We have not seen one drop of water returned to the system since this government came to office in 2007—two years ago yesterday. They were handed, on a gold plate, a plan thought through by the now Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, the then Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, and announced in January 2007. It has not been moved on in respect of agricultural investment. It is an absolute disgrace. There is a complete lack of effort being put into that area. Instead, there is just an obses-
ession with buybacks in the wrong part of the system—not delivering any real water. We all accept that buybacks are a part of the answer to this crisis. They were part of the plan announced in January 2007 by the then minister for the environment. But what we have seen with this government is an obsession with buybacks because that is the easy thing for them to do. They do not have to do the hard yards like saving water through on- and off-farm infrastructure investments. So it is a complete ‘F’ for failure for the Rudd government in that respect—not enough spent, not enough effort made; lots of spin, no substance. We see that all too often.

The parliamentary secretary also talked about all they are doing in relation to urban water in cities. We welcome that. We welcome such a commitment because the state Labor governments across the country have been fundamental failures in planning for the future. We have had eight long years of the Rann government in South Australia and clearly the Premier has had too much on his plate. Clearly he has been too busy; clearly he has been focused on other things. He has not been straight with the South Australian people. We know that. We have seen that all too often recently. He has not focused on this issue and therefore the federal government must come in and do something about it. It is a disgrace and on 20 March next year will see a change of government. We will see Isobel Redmond come in with real plans for recycled water. We will see Isobel Redmond come in with real plans to talk straight to the South Australian people about what she believes in and what she will do to fix the water crisis, not only in the urban centres of South Australia but also in the Murray-Darling Basin and in the Great Lower Lakes, which are in my electorate. We have seen a complete failure by the Rann government and by its Minister for Water Security, the Nationals SA member for Chaffey, who will lose her seat to Tim Whetstone next March.

We have seen from the federal government two years of failure, having had a gold-plated plan handed to them by the then minister for the environment. And we have seen eight long years of failure by the Rann government in South Australia. The two of those combined mean we have an urban water crisis in South Australia, no investment in recycling, a Murray-Darling Basin crisis and a Lower Lakes crisis—complete failure by the Labor governments. We need a change. Malcolm Turnbull, the Leader of the Opposition, said two months ago in South Australia that when he is elected Prime Minister next year he will finish the job he started. That means putting real focus on on-farm and off-farm investment which will deliver real water. There will be 200 gigalitres put back into the Menindee Lakes system alone for environmental and irrigation flows.

The Labor Party forgets that Australia still needs to grow its own food. If you buy out the farms—if you buy out all the water entitlements—you will have a situation where we do not grow our own food. That is a situation that we on this side of parliament want to avoid. It is a situation that those on the other side have not thought through, which is just so consistent with how this government goes about so many policy areas. It is disappointing to see the parliamentary secretary, who very rarely speaks on this issue in this place, raise the issue of the $10 billion water plan in negative sense. It was the most groundbreaking, well thought through plan on water that has been put to this place since Federation. It dealt with a lot of the significant issues. Unfortunately, when the Rudd government was elected it dropped the ball. It did a deal with John Brumby in Victoria and it failed to get a truly national system, and it is the lack of a national system
that has caused most of the problems we face today.

It is a failure of leadership by this Prime Minister, a failure of leadership by the Minister for Water Security in South Australia, who has had other things on her plate, and a failure by the state premiers. The South Australian Premier clearly has had other things on his mind. He has not been able to focus on these issues. He has been off topic. We do not know what he has been up to but he has not been up to water. That is what he has not been up to. It is disappointing. We will hear now the defence from the member for Kingston, a good member but one who is misguided on this issue. This is the most important issue facing my electorate. (Time expired)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.25 pm)—I take great pleasure in speaking on this MPI because water is one of the most important issues to South Australians. We heard the member for Mayo talk about how good the $10 billion water plan of the previous Prime Minister was. Unfortunately, it was only a plan on paper. Not one cent of that water plan was actually delivered. It is very disappointing because for the 11 years during which he was the Prime Minister we saw no effort on water. Closer to the election—when he realised he needed to look a bit environmental, to get in touch with the greenies—he decided to put forward this plan with no intention of ever delivering it.

I will point out a couple of things. Firstly, I note that the member for Mayo said we all agree with buybacks. He obviously missed the member for Parkes, who actually indicated that he was against buybacks. This once again highlights the division within the Liberal and National parties. The member for Mayo supports buybacks and the Leader of the Opposition supports buybacks. On 5AA on 28 April 2009, the Leader of the Opposition said:

I think there is a role for government in buying back water and, indeed, I undertook to buy back water when I was the water minister.

So we see the Liberal Party seeming to support buybacks but then we have the National Party which does not support buybacks. There is a real tension that seems to keep raising its ugly head in this place. Whether it is on the CPRS or on things like the structural separation of Telstra, we see that the Liberal Party and the National Party are constantly at odds and divided with one another.

But we are talking about what this government is doing for water. This government has a very clear plan. We have made it clear that water buybacks are part of the solution to improve environmental flows and in fact we have secured 638 gigalitres worth $996 million. This has been a very successful program returning significant water to the Murray-Darling Basin. In addition to this, we have also invested significant amounts on irrigation infrastructure. I will talk about one project in McLaren Vale in my local electorate. I am so pleased to see the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government here in the chamber because he came with me as opposition water minister to pledge to the people of McLaren Vale that he would provide the money to deliver recycled water. We have delivered on that pledge. We have heard the member for Parkes and the member for Mayo say, ‘You haven’t delivered anything.’ I can tell you 120 irrigators in McLaren Vale have been able to switch from mains water to recycled water, saving the need for them to draw water from the Murray-Darling system.

In Adelaide there has been a significant amount of investment in water infrastructure to reduce our reliance on the Murray. We in Adelaide know that we are one of the driest
places and that we rely on the Murray-Darling system for our drinking water. The Rudd government has invested significant money. We heard before that there was supposedly no money spent on things like stormwater and recycled water. Obviously, the member for Mayo, who made that claim, has not been reading my newsletter. Otherwise, he would know of the recent significant announcement that this government would deliver $14.97 million for the city of Onkaparinga to invest in stormwater infrastructure to enable us to follow through with an innovative stormwater capture project to drought proof the south. This is what South Australians have been calling for—money to be delivered to their local electorates.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georgantas)—Order! The time allotted for this discussion has concluded.

PROCEDURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF WITNESSES BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES AND MEMBERS’ INTERESTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.30 pm)—I move:

That the House:

In considering any matter referred to it which may involve, or give rise to any allegation of, a contempt, the Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests shall observe the procedures set out in this resolution, in addition to any procedures adopted by the House for the protection of witnesses before committees. Where this resolution is inconsistent with any such procedures adopted by the House for the protection of witnesses, this resolution shall prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.

(1) Any person who is the subject of proposed investigation by the committee must be notified in advance of the specific nature of the allegations made against them, preferably formulated as a specific charge, or if this is not possible, of the general nature of the issues being investigated, in order to allow them to respond.

(2) The committee shall extend to that person all reasonable opportunity and time to respond to such allegations and charges by:

(a) making written submission to the committee;
(b) giving evidence before the committee;
(c) having other evidence placed before the committee; and
(d) having witnesses examined before the committee.

(3) Where oral evidence is given containing any allegation against, or reflecting adversely on, a person, the committee shall ensure that that person is present during the hearing of that evidence, subject to a discretion to exclude the person when proceedings are held in private, and shall afford all reasonable opportunity for that person, by counsel or personally, to examine witnesses in relation to that evidence.

(4) A person appearing before the committee may be accompanied by counsel, and shall be given all reasonable opportunity to consult counsel during that appearance.

(5) A witness shall not be required to answer in public session any question where the committee has reason to believe that the answer may incriminate the witness.

(6) Witnesses shall be heard by the Committee on oath or affirmation.

(7) Hearing of evidence by the committee shall be conducted in public session, except where the committee determines, on its own initiative or at the request of a witness that the interests of the witness or the public interest warrant the hearing of evidence in private session.

(8) The committee may appoint counsel to assist.

(9) The committee may authorise, subject to rules determined by the committee, the examination by counsel of witnesses before the committee.
(10) As soon as practicable after the committee has determined findings to be included in the committee’s report to the House, and prior to the presentation of the report, a person affected by those findings shall be acquainted with the findings and afforded all reasonable opportunity to make submissions to the committee, in writing and orally, on those findings. The committee shall take such submissions into account before making its report to the House.

(11) If the committee determines to make a recommendation to the House on a penalty to be imposed on a person, the person affected shall be afforded all reasonable opportunity to make submissions to the committee, in writing and orally, in relation to the proposed penalty. The committee shall take such submissions into account before making its report to the House.

(12) The committee may consider the reimbursement of costs of representation of witnesses before the committee. Where the committee is satisfied that a person would suffer substantial hardship due to liability to pay the costs of representation of the person before the committee, or in the interests of justice, the committee may make reimbursement of all or part of such costs as the committee considers reasonable.

(13) A member who has instigated an allegation of contempt or who is directly implicated in an allegation, shall not serve as a member of the committee for any inquiry by the committee into that matter.

(14) Before appearing before the committee a witness shall be given a copy of this resolution.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests has reviewed its procedures and obtained advice in order to allow for natural justice and procedural fairness for witnesses who appear before it. Although the committee has followed procedures of its own determination, a review began in the 41st Parliament with a view to having procedures and processes that have been endorsed by the House. This proposal is being moved to bring the procedures of the committee in line with those followed by the Senate Committee of Privileges: for example, in recognising the right of witnesses to be accompanied by counsel, the right of the committee to appoint counsel to assist it and the right of a person affected by adverse findings to be given an opportunity to make submissions on those findings before the committee reports to the House.

This procedural motion will mean that any person who is the subject of investigation by the committee must be notified of the allegations against them to allow them to appropriately respond, must be given all reasonable opportunity and time to respond to the allegations or charges, must be given the opportunity to be present with their counsel when evidence is given against them and the opportunity to examine witnesses in relation to that evidence, will be made aware of the committee’s findings and afforded all reasonable opportunity to make submissions to the committee before it makes its report to the House and will be afforded all reasonable opportunity to make submissions to the committee before it reports to the House where the committee recommends a penalty be imposed on a person.

This motion will also ensure that witnesses before the committee may be assisted by counsel if they choose to be so, that they will not be required to answer questions in public where the committee believes that the answer may incriminate the witness, that they will be heard on oath or affirmation, that they may request to be heard in private at their request and that they will receive a copy of this motion before appearing before the committee.

The committee will have the right to appoint its own counsel if it so chooses to assist
it with examining witnesses and evidence. The committee will also prohibit any member who is the subject of an allegation of contempt or directly implicated in an allegation from serving for that procedure. This motion has been recommended by the committee. No comment has been received by the committee since its report on this review was tabled in the House in October 2008. I now propose that the procedures be adopted.

**Mr PYNE** (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (5.33 pm)—The opposition does not oppose this motion on the procedures for the protection of witnesses before the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests. We endorse the recommendations that have been made by the committee. It is not a trend but it is useful to have some bipartisanship in this place every now and then. On this issue, the opposition has been part of the process of proposing these recommendations. I note that they are very similar to the rules that largely are in place in the Senate Standing Committee of Privileges. As the Leader of the House has outlined, they allow a person subject to investigation to be given advance notice of allegations raised, they require that a person who is subject to investigation be given reasonable opportunity to respond, they create the opportunity for the first time for any person appearing before the committee to have counsel and for the committee itself to appoint counsel to assist it in its deliberations, and they put in a new rule that a person affected by a committee finding has the opportunity to respond. The committee may consider reimbursement of costs of representation of a witness before the committee. They enhance the process for people who are the subject of matters before the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests Committee to be properly looked after and to protect their rights and, as a consequence, the opposition endorses these changes.

Question agreed to.

**PROCEDURES OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR DEALING WITH MATTERS OF CONTEMPT**

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.35 pm)—I move:

That:

(1) The House, in considering any matter which may give rise to a contempt of the House, shall observe the procedures set out in this resolution:

(a) for any motion that makes a finding of contempt or that imposes any sanction for contempt, seven sitting days notice must be given;

(b) if, in considering any matter that may give rise to a contempt, the House wishes to consider further evidence not previously provided to the Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests, the person or persons accused of contempt shall be given the opportunity to respond to that evidence;

(c) where the House proposes to impose a punitive penalty on a person or persons for contempt, the person or persons shall have the opportunity to address the House, either orally or in writing;

(d) where the Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests has made a recommendation for the imposition of a penalty on a person or persons for contempt, the House shall not impose a penalty which exceeds that recommended by the Committee;

(e) where the Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests concludes in a report to the House that there is no finding of contempt against a person or persons, the House cannot make any finding of contempt against the person or persons; and

(f) any members who initiated an allegation of contempt should not vote in any divisions on motions relating to any findings, or impositions of penalties, for those contempts; and
This resolution has effect and continues in force unless or until amended or rescinded by the House in this or a subsequent Parliament.

The Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests has reviewed the procedures of the House in dealing with matters of contempt and noted some additional procedures. These matters have been examined and reported on previously. This proposal involves the House adopting rules to be observed in respect of the imposition of a penalty for contempt. They ensure that, with the House retaining the ability to punish contempts rather than transferring this power to the courts, reasonable rights and protections will be afforded to persons who may be involved. This procedural motion means that, for any member subject to an allegation of contempt, firstly, an opportunity will be afforded to the person or persons accused of contempt to respond to evidence considered by the House and, secondly, an opportunity is afforded to the person or persons to address the House where the House proposes to impose a punitive penalty.

For the House, for any motion of contempt the House must provide seven sitting days notice, the House cannot impose a penalty for contempt which exceeds that recommended by the committee, the House cannot make any finding of contempt where the committee has made a finding of no guilt; and that a person who makes an allegation of contempt should not vote in any divisions on motions relating to any findings, or impositions of penalties, for those contempts. The opposition thinks these are improvements to the way in which matters of contempt are dealt with by the House of Representatives. The Procedures Committee has done a good job on both of these matters, and the opposition endorses the recommended changes.

Question agreed to.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (INCOME SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS) BILL 2009 [No. 2]

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 Work-
That this bill be now read a second time.

It is a pity that the debate about student income reform has come to this. May I remind the House of how we reached the point where I am introducing a bill for student income reform that is comparable to a bill that I introduced earlier this year. I think it would weigh on the minds of those on the Liberal and National parties’ side of the parliament to reflect on how we got here.

When the government was elected in 2007, the circumstances were that the participation rate of country kids at our universities was going down; the participation rate of students from poorer backgrounds, from low-SES households, was going down. While this was happening it was an open secret that our student income support system was not working effectively and, in particular, that a significant number of students from upper-income families, families earning more than $200,000 or $300,000 a year, were living at home and getting full youth allowance. These facts were known.

The then Howard government—and obviously many members of today’s opposition were members of the Howard government either as frontbench ministers or backbenchers—took no steps to address this matter. There was no talk then, under the Howard government, of additional steps to assist rural and regional students. There was no talk then, as Peter Costello delivered more than 10 budgets, of allocating an additional $1 billion to student income support. Even though these problems were known, the Howard government had no plan to act, and it is my recollection that at the 2007 election the then Howard government had announced no plan to act.

Consequently, when we were elected in 2007 we recognised that there were significant problems for Australia’s universities, which were underfunded; significant problems with lack of reform in the system, which was ossified; and significant problems with equity and participation in higher education. It was because of these significant problems that the government commissioned the Bradley review, led by a very eminent Australian, Denise Bradley, to advise government on a profound set of reforms to our higher education system. After what was effectively a year-long review, Denise Bradley delivered to government a report that had enough information in it to cause anybody who cared about future productivity, prosperity and equity in this country to be concerned.

In response to that Denise Bradley report, in the May budget this year the government embarked on a landmark set of reforms for higher education. It is correct to say that these are the most transformative reforms, the biggest reforms, to happen to higher education since the Dawkins reforms of the 1980s, when John Dawkins was the Labor government’s Minister for Employment, Education and Training. The scale and magnitude of our reforms cause anything that the Howard government did to pale into insignificance. This is a reform path for our universities for this century. It comes with significant new resources; indeed, more than $5 billion of new investment in our higher education and innovation systems was delivered by this government in the May budget.

Significantly, this puts Australian universities on a growth path. We have set very high aspirational targets for participation in higher education and the attainment of an undergraduate qualification by young Australians. These are 2020 targets that will be difficult for this nation to reach, but we believe they are important if this nation is to have a competitive future in what is a cutthroat world.
These landmark reforms also deliver on a new system of equity for higher education. On this side of the House, we believe it is an offence against decency, against equity, against the Australian ethos of fairness, that if you come from an upper-income household you are many times more likely to go on to university than if you come from a poor family. That is wrong, and we aim to correct it.

We aim to correct it through an integrated set of reforms. That is what our education revolution is about: reforms in early childhood, reforms in schools, reforms in vocational education and training. But we also aim to correct it through these powerful new reforms to Australia’s universities. That is why we have set a target of, by 2020, 20 per cent of the enrolments at our universities being students from low SES backgrounds. It is not because we intend to compromise on quality. We most certainly do not. All of the research tells us that, properly supported, low SES students can achieve at university at the same rate as their counterparts from more moneyed and advantaged backgrounds. We believe they should get that opportunity.

We have consequently not only built growth into the system; we have built growth with equity into the system, including new funding streams to encourage universities to seek the participation of Australians from lower socioeconomic households and to partner with schools in the delivery of systems to support those Australians from school into university.

As we delivered this transformative set of changes to higher education, we announced a better targeted and fairer student income support system. Let us go through the key features of that student income support system. Those key features are contained in this bill, as they were contained in the bill that I introduced before the House earlier this year. Those key features are as follows. The bill enables 150,000 students to receive start-up scholarships, which will, when the system is in full operation, be worth $2,254 a year. This contrasts with the strictly limited scholarship system now, where 21,000 students receive Commonwealth Scholarships.

This bill delivers changes to the family means test rates for the receipt of youth allowance. Those changes are important to enable almost 25,000 families with incomes between just $32,800 and $44,165 to get the maximum rate of youth allowance and a further 78,000 students to receive a higher payment than they otherwise would have received.

This bill enables the delivery of Relocation Scholarships, with an eligibility for $4,000 in the first year. This bill also brings down the age of independence of students progressively over time from 25 years of age to 22 years of age. This will see an estimated 7,600 new recipients of the independent rate of youth allowance. These changes also enable students to keep more of the money they earn without it affecting youth allowance.

It is a better targeted system, a system where we have unashamedly stopped the circumstance where students in metropolitan areas living at home in families earning $200,000 and $300,000 a year got full youth allowance. We have redirected that money to better supporting students who need it the most.

Clearly, as members of the parliament would recall, there was an issue about the transition from the current system to the new system. I acknowledge that that transition issue caused stress and anxiety for a number of students who were on a gap year this year—that is, they had made arrangements to take a year off, seeking to qualify for youth allowance under the old rules, before they could have known about the May budget...
changes. The government responded to that issue by amending the bill after my consultations with students.

The bill is therefore one that, through the government’s initial own amending, dealt with the transition issue most raised by Liberal and National party members with me—that is, the transition issue that was associated with students on a gap year this year who had made arrangements to take a gap year before the May budget and who needed to move in order to undertake university education. The government had already responded to that.

With that change already in place, the bill went from this place to the Senate. Amendments at that stage were moved by the coalition but were unacceptable to the government on the basis of fiscal prudence and on the basis of equity. On the basis of fiscal prudence, combined these changes would have cost the Commonwealth budget more than $1 billion. This was in circumstances where, I remind people, members who were advocating these changes had actually had the power, when they were in government, to allocate government money to student financing and they had never sought to increase student financing with a new allocation of $1 billion. It did not happen.

I think it would cause Australians—who tend to be wise enough to judge people by what they do rather than by what they say—to think: ‘Why is it that members of parliament who were on the government benches for almost 12 years should suddenly discover the need to invest a new $1 billion in student income support when, over 12 years, they never evidenced an intention of doing that?’

So, on a fiscal basis, these changes by the coalition were unacceptable, particularly when the coalition’s leading spokespeople—the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer, for example—frequently said that they were concerned about debt and deficit. In those circumstances, to seek to allocate over $1 billion of money without matching savings was obviously an imprudent thing to do.

Secondly, the propositions of the opposition were not right on equity grounds. To the extent there were matching savings offered—and they were not sufficient to cover the new expenditure—they were permanent cuts to scholarships; cuts that would have taken $700 million in the form of scholarships out of the hands of students, $162 million of it out of the hands of country kids. On an equity basis, we believed that was wrong and, on an equity basis, the amendments were unacceptable because they would have perpetuated the continuation of a system which has seen the participation rates of country kids in Australia’s universities go backwards.

As we know, when the bill was returned to the House of Representatives the government indicated that these amendments were unacceptable. The bill returned to the Senate last night. By the time the bill returned to the Senate the government had, in negotiations with the Greens and Senator Xenophon, further addressed concerns about transition issues. The bill before the parliament brings that agreement to legislative life. It contains the amendments that were agreed with the Greens Party and with Senator Xenophon.

These amendments would have enabled more students to benefit from transition arrangements if they were on a gap year, including students living at home, but there would have been a means test at $150,000 for students living at home. We thought that was a sensible compromise to assist students who made arrangements before the government’s changes became known—a sensible compromise between dealing with equity considerations and having the means test on
students living at home. I thank the Greens Party and I thank Senator Xenophon for showing the maturity to deal with this issue and showing the maturity to do it in a budget neutral context, with the change being paid for by a reduction in start-up scholarships in the first year but with start-up scholarships going to their full value of $2,254 in the year after.

When the bill came up in the Senate last night, the first thing that happened is that the Senate did not insist on the coalition’s amendments. It is important, I think, that participants in this debate—the Liberal Party and the National Party—realise that they do not have a majority in the Senate for their amendments. They might be unhappy about that; they probably are. But that is the truth. They cannot get their amendments up.

Ms GILLARD—The churlishness of the opposition, which I was just about to go to, is being evidenced very clearly by the shadow minister, who views this as a matter of politics and not a matter of young people’s lives. In circumstances where the coalition’s amendments no longer had the support of the Senate, we then sought to deliver the beneficial changes that we had negotiated with the Greens Party and with Senator Xenophon.

These beneficial changes could not be included in the bill in the Senate because the Liberal and National parties voted against them—that is, in a churlish act, because their amendments had not been carried, they repudiated these beneficial amendments. Their view, not at all driven by the interests of students, was simply a tit for tat political round in which, if they were not able to get what they wanted, they were not going to give students the benefit of something else—nothing more, nothing less. Any view of the opposition’s rhetoric during the course of this debate would have led you to conclude that they would have voted for these beneficial new provisions negotiated with the Greens party and Senator Xenophon, but politics, rather than the interests of students, prevailed.

Then the bill in the Senate was effectively sidelined by the Senate. It has been adjourned, effectively, in committee. It has not been defeated by the Senate. It has gone into some form of limbo. What is the cost of that bill staying in some form of limbo? The cost of that bill staying in some form of limbo is that the government cannot deliver these beneficial changes for students—that is, 150,000 students will not get scholarships next year. Kids who, by anybody’s definition, live in low-income households will not get full youth allowance next year. Kids who are reliant on low- and middle-income households—possibly not living in them, but living away from home to study—whose parents have low and middle incomes, who could get an increased rate of youth allowance, will not get it next year.

This is not a matter of politics; this is a matter of fact. There are 150,000 kids who will not get start-up scholarships next year. Thousands of kids who need to move to study will not get relocation scholarships. Thousands of low- and middle-income kids who could have had the full rate of youth allowance, a higher rate of youth allowance, or eligibility for youth allowance for the first time, will not get that money.

The other reform features of the bill will also not come into operation: the independence age going down to 22 and the new arrangements to allow students to keep more of the money they earn before they lose youth allowance. Those beneficial changes cannot be delivered.

Understandably, the education system in this country has reacted with scorn and fury to this playing of politics by the Liberal and
National parties. I refer people to the comments of those who care most about education. Last week, I conducted a press conference with people who care about education. They were vice-chancellors, speaking on behalf of all of the vice-chancellors in this country. At the press conference, Ian Chubb, the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, said:

Well we as a Group of 8—that is, the Group of Eight universities—support this Bill. We think that it’s particularly important that it pass, that it pass quickly so that we can give some information to and certainty to the students.

Ross Milbourne, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology, Sydney, spoke on behalf of our technology universities and said:

I speak really with my other fellow Vice-Chancellors on behalf of the entire higher education sector who’s unanimous on supporting the legislation… from my perspective, failure to pass this legislation today is not only bad for the education system in Australia, but it’s bad social policy and is very bad long term economic policy.

Then Paul Johnson, the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University, who represented innovative research universities, said:

These students and their parents are having a tough time at present, we all know of the problems in the economy of regional and rural Australia. The proposed legislation will make a fundamental difference to all these families, all these students and their mums and dads.

Then the representative of students, David Barrow, the President of the National Union of Students, said:

Let me… say that students unequivocally support these… scholarships.

Those were the voices of the education sector last week. Their voices were joined on Friday by the voices of all state and territory education and training ministers, who called on the federal opposition to pass the government’s youth allowance changes. Let us just reflect for a moment on that word ‘all’. Madam Deputy Speaker Moylan, I think you would particularly appreciate this: if all education and training ministers around the country called on the opposition to pass this bill then that would have included the Liberal government of Western Australia, which has departed from the opposition on this churlish strategy.

What we saw in the Senate last night from the opposition was: ‘Vice-chancellors? Don’t listen to them. Students? Don’t listen to them. Education ministers around the country? Don’t listen to them. Wreak great harm against students and their families next year.’ That does not seem to matter to the Liberal and National parties. They would rather play politics, and they did. They did so by not allowing passage of this bill. The reaction to that has been fast and furious, as it should be. David Barrow, the President of the National Union of Students, put it well when he said:

Last night so many good elements were blocked; a drop in the age of independence to 22—blocked, new personal income test thresholds—blocked, new scholarships—blocked, a system that gets the poorest students to university—blocked.

What remains is an inequitable relic of the Howard-era. It is easily rorted by the privileged. It means 30% of gap year students will not return to university. The current system disadvantages poor and regional students the most.

Then Ross Milbourne, from the Australian Technology Network of Universities, said:

Failure by the Coalition and Family First Senator, Steve Fielding to support this amended legislation is not only bad for the education system in Australia, but it’s bad social policy and is very bad long term economic policy.

The amended Bill would have delivered a level of financial security for those students most in need.

He went on to say:
These scholarships help very poor students give more time and attention to their studies by reducing stress and worry, reducing their paid work hours, and increasing their sense of belonging. As a result, these students have attrition rates about 40% lower than other students—the benefit of this scholarship is tangible.

These are the words of the education sector on what happened last night. I understand that the Liberal and National parties have campaigned on these issues. They have raised these issues. I believe that there are some members of the Liberal and National parties who have been genuine in their pursuit of these issues. They have come and spoken to me. Some of them have sought briefings. They have wanted to understand the details of the legislation and to really get to grips with it. Some of them have been very genuine about being concerned about transition issues. But it is time for the Liberal-National Party members to acknowledge that those transition issues have effectively been resolved by the amendments to the bill that the government volunteered and by the additional amendments that we have agreed to with the Greens party and Senator Xenophon.

There may be opposition members who say, ‘We are still sceptical.’ I think I am entitled to ask: ‘Where were their voices over 12 long years of government?’ If we move on from that point and say, ‘We have agreed to a review of these provisions; we were always going to have a review,’ I am very confident that the review will show that these arrangements are better for regional and rural students. We have also agreed—and this has been something pressed by some members of the opposition—to an averaging arrangement in relation to the 30 hours a week for the new independence criteria. That has been sought. We believe we can manage it within a budget-neutral envelope, and it is contained in this bill.

So what is pressing members on to keep blocking this bill? I am not advised of any changes that the opposition seeks that are budget neutral. Last night the Senate spokesperson, the then shadow parliamentary secretary dealing with the matter in the Senate—I believe that he may have resigned his parliamentary secretaryship today; it is not entirely clear to me—seemed to indicate that one thing that the opposition wanted was all of this stopped and to have the old Commonwealth scholarships back. Madam Deputy Speaker, what would make you think 21,000 scholarships were better than 150,000 scholarships, plus relocation scholarships? So what is it that the opposition is continuing to press for that is achievable and attainable beyond the playing of politics? If the opposition has a budget-neutral amendment that is equitable, I have not seen it yet. If members opposite are going to continue this politics then let it not be done in the name of regional and rural students, because this package is good for regional and rural students and the people who care genuinely about their interests have said so. The vice-chancellors that run the universities the students study in, the student organisation that speaks on their behalf and the state ministers who represent them in state parliaments have all said so.

Do not do it in their name. If you are going to press on with this destructive course then do it in the name of what it is: the cheapest, most destructive form of politics I have seen played out in this parliament in a good while. Next year, have the guts to go and sit with the students you have ripped off and explain to them that the rip-offs were just about politics, that they were just about a desperate hope that you could continue a campaign in some electorates. That must be the only thing now driving this, because there is no credible, budget-neutral amendment being proffered by the opposition.
There is not one. There is not one here, not one in the Senate, not one anywhere. I would say to those opposition members—and some of them have caught me on the way in and out of question time; some of them have come around to my office; some of them have talked to my staff—who are genuinely concerned about this issue: do not now vote as a matter of reflex. Actually think about it. Think about what it is that you are asking this government to do. Is it budget neutral and equitable? If you are unable to answer that question then it is time to vote for this bill.

The government is happy to make arrangements for the second reading debate on this bill to continue straightaway, if the opposition are ready to do that. If they are not ready to do that then we will be happy to have the debate adjourned.

Mr Pyne—We agree.

Ms Gillard—If the opposition is ready to do it then we will seek to bring the second reading debate to an end expeditiously, to get this bill into the Senate in the hope that we can next year give kids who need money the money they are entitled to. I commend the bill to the House.

Leave granted for second reading debate to continue immediately.

Mr Pyne (Sturt) (6.09 pm)—To outline for the Deputy Prime Minister: we on the opposition side intend—as we have already done in granting leave—to continue the second reading debate. We intend to move a second reading amendment and we intend to then have a debate in the committee stage as well. We are facilitating this debate by allowing it to go through to a vote tonight so that you will be able to move it through into the Senate and try your luck in the Senate with getting it through. The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2] is still fatally flawed, in the view of us on this side of the House.

The Senate last night voted down the Labor Party’s youth allowance legislation, which would have retrospectively impacted upon thousands of Australian students currently in their gap year and crushed the higher education dreams of thousands of rural and regional students into the future. The youth allowance bill contained a number of worthwhile measures that the coalition would have been happy to support. However, we will not allow the government to increase funding to one group of students only by ripping away the higher education dreams of country students. The Labor government has also placed in jeopardy the scholarships of thousands by abolishing the old Commonwealth scholarships system in a previous bill and replacing them with those in this bill, despite warnings from the coalition and Family First at the time that to abolish the scholarships without concurrently legislating their replacements was pure folly. They refused to heed the warnings of the coalition that abolishing Commonwealth scholarships without an acceptable alternative in place meant that there would be no scholarships next year. This is entirely the government’s fault, as they alone control the legislative program.

The coalition has told the government that, if they wish to introduce a separate bill to reintroduce the scholarships for 2010, we will give that bill priority this week so that students will be able to receive scholarships next year. The coalition would also be happy to pass the government’s bill so long as they amended it to deal with the threshold issues that we have raised. We have made it clear that the coalition will hold firm on our two primary concerns with this bill. Firstly, the coalition cannot support legislation that cuts out the gap year pathway to independent youth allowance for students who must leave
home to attend university unless a realistic alternative provision is put in place—which it has not been. Secondly, the coalition cannot on principle support legislation that is retrospective in its effect. We note that the government have moved towards addressing this issue with their new amendments. They have come a long way towards addressing many of the coalition’s concerns with respect to retrospectivity, but we still cannot support the legislation while they are seeking to change the goalposts for any students who made a good-faith decision to take a year off in order to earn independent youth allowance based on the advice of Centrelink officials, their school careers advisers or others.

Let me take the House through a history of this bill and the sorry situation the government finds itself in. I speak to the House tonight more in sadness than in anger, because the opposition warned the government on many occasions following the May budget about the real concerns that we had about the changes to youth allowance. Can I say that we do believe that there needs to be reform of the youth allowance. We endorse many of the Bradley review’s recommendations, and we were moving to reform youth allowance in government. There is no doubt that reform should be brought to youth allowance, but in bringing reform to youth allowance we on this side of the House cannot support measures that we cannot support in principle—like retrospectivity—or that damage the pathways to university of young people from rural and regional Australia.

We on this side of the House know—and I am sure some of my colleagues will point this out—that once a rural youth who would otherwise have gone to university gives up that dream the prospects of them going back to university at some stage in the future are virtually nil. The disadvantage that rural and regional students face in accessing university will be compounded by the government’s changes because of the reforms they are bringing about, which as we have pointed out will essentially mean that young people in rural areas will have to find 30 hours of work a week over an 18-month period to be able to qualify for the new independent rate.

I am not surprised that the government side of the House does not understand that rural students will not be able to find 30 hours a week paid work in country areas for an 18-month period. It does not surprise me that they do not know that, because they are not the party that represents a large part of rural and regional Australia. That is represented by the Liberal Party, the National Party and the Independent members. So it comes as no surprise to me that they have missed the boat on this particular reform. There are members on the Labor side of the House, people like the member for Braddon, the member for Capricornia, the member for Dawson and others, who should know better about supporting a change that will so impact on rural and regional students, who will not be able to get work for 30 hours a week to be able to access the independent rate.

But in taking you through the history of this bill, I should point out that the opposition has in May, in June, in October and again in November said time and time again that the Commonwealth scholarships, having been abolished in the budget measures bill from 1 January 2010, face the prospect of being abolished entirely without a replacement because of this minister’s historic mismanagement of the reform of youth allowance. There has been no policy ever taken through this parliament that has been so mismanaged by a minister of the Crown than the current reform of youth allowance.

One of the reasons I believe is because the minister is a part-time education minister. She is also the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, and she is also the
Minister for Social Inclusion. Unfortunately, in so many parts of her portfolio, we see again and again that she makes a botch-up of the implementation of policy. We saw it on trade training centres and on computers in schools with the $800 million blow-out rising to $1.2 billion. We have seen it most particularly and most recently with the school’s stimulus debacle, which has the twin elements of a $1.7 billion blow-out with unwanted, in many cases, and unneeded infrastructure being foisted on schools throughout the country and the massive inflation and skimming that has occurred in that program. There were so many other priorities in education which should have been funded, but that goes to her general management of the education portfolio.

In terms of youth allowance, the government ploughed on with this bill, maintaining that the Commonwealth scholarships for 2010 must be in it in the vain and futile belief that that would cause the opposition to buckle, that we would respond to political blackmail, that if they held a gun to the head of the opposition that we would fold. But the minister has miscalculated very badly, and I would implore her to recognise that her pride is much less important than the lives of students and their capacity to go to university next year. The minister must recognise that separating this bill from the Commonwealth scholarships for 2010 is the only way forward.

The opposition has said—and I said it again today and I have said it over and over again—that if the government separates the Commonwealth scholarships for 2010 from this bill we will pass and will give priority in both this place and the Senate to a bill that re-institutes the Commonwealth scholarships in 2010 so that students will not go without. Then we will deal with the youth allowance reforms, which should have always been in a separate bill. If the minister agrees to do that today then the coalition will support it and students will not be worse off.

But she has chosen not to, and the reasons for that are really a matter for her. She has of course had absolutely no consultation with me and no consultation with my office. At 2.56 pm today a staffer from her office rang my office and arrogantly asserted that we would be forced to vote for this bill. That is a matter for them and how they wish to manage their affairs in the Deputy Prime Minister’s office. But what most ministers would have done and what has been the tradition in this House, is that when there is an impasse of this nature they would contact the shadow minister and they would speak to the shadow minister about what the coalition would be prepared to do. The shadow minister would respond, hopefully in good faith and fairly.

So we realise the pickle you have got yourself into. We realise that by linking these two measures together you have mismanaged it. We would try as much as we could to help the minister out of the pickle for the good of the students. But this minister has not picked up the phone, has not contacted me. She has engaged in the usual megaphone diplomacy in the mistaken belief that the opposition would fold and that we would pass this bill through. In the Senate last night we did not do so, with the support of Senator Fielding. Through a number of measures she has been able to convince the Greens and Senator Xenophon to support this legislation, but not Senator Fielding and certainly not the opposition.

If the government comes to the opposition and says that they will separate these bills between now and the time they get to the Senate, the opposition will give that due consideration. There is no point in this House today moving the same amendments that we moved at the previous time this bill was debated, because we know that the minister has
already indicated that she will give it absolutely no consideration. It might surprise some people to find out in this place that the opposition does not have the numbers and we would not get our amendments carried. Therefore in this place there will be no point.

In the Senate, on the other hand, we will, because we have the capacity to bring about reform to this bill and to change it. We will consider moving our amendments and seeing them supported by, hopefully, the government. The most important of those is putting rural and regional students back in the position where they will be able to access the independent rate of youth allowance without having to fulfil a criterion which, in almost every case and in almost every town across Australia they will not be able to fulfil, which is a 30-hour work test for 18 months. So I flag that the opposition will vote against this bill in the House of Representatives. If it remains unamended in the Senate, we will vote against it. I move tonight a second reading amendment upon which we will also vote, which reads:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“the House:

(1) registers its dismay that this legislation cuts out the ‘gap year’ pathway to Independent Youth Allowance for students who must leave home to attend University, requiring that students instead find 30 hours employment per week for 18 months in order to gain Independent Youth Allowance;

(2) registers its concern that this legislation will lead to the retrospective removal of access to Youth Allowance for a number of students who undertook a ‘gap year’ in 2009 on the basis of advice from Government officials, including teachers, careers advisers and Centrelink officials; and

(3) urges the Government to:

(a) offer further amendments that will remove all of the negative retrospective effects of this legislation; and

(b) provide a reasonable pathway to gaining Independent Youth Allowance for those students who must leave home in order to participate in Higher Education”.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—Is the amendment seconded?

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (6.22 pm)—I am happy to second the amendment. The amendment proposed by the shadow minister brings sense and balance to this debate, and I would like to compliment the shadow minister for the patience that he has shown in dealing with this issue when the government is not prepared to take what are perfectly reasonable steps to help to resolve this issue. We all want a fair go for students, but what we object to very strongly on this side of the House is the retrospective nature of this legislation. Many students around this country, 25,000 or more, took the advice of their student counsellors, of Centrelink, of their teachers to undertake a gap year so that they could become eligible for an independent youth allowance so they could commence university studies. This is particularly important for people who live outside the capital cities, who have the extra costs associated with having to make a new home in the city, find some accommodation, travel to and from their place of residence, to make a new life a long way away from their friends and family supports. Those are the sorts of people in particular who have needed some income to enable them to undertake their tertiary education.

The minister has said on a number of occasions, sometimes with seeming feeling, that she is concerned about the lower proportion of regional students who actually go to university. In fact, the further you get away from a regional town, the further you get away from the city, the lower the proportion
of people who achieve tertiary education becomes. That is simply not acceptable. The minister is the Minister for Social Inclusion. If she believes in social inclusion then the fact that a significant proportion of our society is disadvantaged in obtaining tertiary education is clearly a matter that ought to be a priority item for her on her agenda. So here she is coming into the House demanding that legislation be passed that will make it more difficult for regional students, and particularly poor regional students, to be able to obtain a tertiary education.

What this legislation boils down to is that it really shows up the lack of sincerity in Labor’s so-called Education Revolution. It all boils down to this: is the Rudd Labor government prepared to arrogantly stand by its retrospective rule changes on youth allowance and consign tens of thousands of students to the education scrapheap? Is the government prepared to say for those students, a very large number of them from regional areas, that education is critically important but just not for them? Or will the government live up to the promise of its so far overblown rhetoric on education and accept some very reasonable and responsible amendments proposed by the coalition and fix the problem? It is the government’s call. This is the government’s problem to fix and not to pathetically try to fob it off on the coalition because it cannot make compromises to assist 25,000 very deserving students.

Deep within the amendment and this legislation is a question of entitlement the government has endeavoured to fix. The coalition has never argued against the general proposition of ensuring the proper use of taxpayers’ money when it comes to entitlement to the youth allowance. We acknowledge that there does need to be reform. What we are upset about is the unleashing of a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. Instead of nuancing this legislation, the Rudd government has reverted to its usual partisan political agenda that defaults to an attack on the regions, in this case regional students. The government has also used the basest form of politics to claim it will be our fault that students will not be entitled to Commonwealth scholarships, even though it was the government that earlier this year abolished these scholarships. They acted unilaterally to abolish the scholarships. They acted to remove the rural and regional scholarships that were so important to people in regional areas. The government was warned early in the piece that this would end up in tears but they did not listen.

Last night the coalition again stood its ground in the Senate and defeated the government’s youth allowance legislation with its retrospective penalty on gap year students. I congratulate all of the coalition senators and Senator Fielding for doing so. Labor trained all their guns on them and they did not blink. In particular can I acknowledge the work of the Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate, Fiona Nash, because of her work as chairman of the committee that has been looking at this legislation. They put a lot of time and effort into trying to find a reasonable solution and the best way forward to give regional students a chance of getting equal educational outcomes with those who live in the cities. They are working on longer term strategies as well as the importance of making sure that there is appropriate support available for students next year and that the grossest parts of this legislation can in fact be effectively reformed.

This is an issue that has prompted a massive response of anger and frustration and concern from young Australians. Many of my colleagues, particularly those who represent regional electorates, have had thousands of people complain about what the government is doing in relation to independent youth allowance. There have been rallies,
there have been meetings, there have been calls all around the country to try and get this situation fixed, but the minister has not been willing to listen—hard-hearted and not willing to listen to the people who are going to miss out on an education as a result of the deliberate actions of this government. So naturally members of parliament have been annoyed and they have responded. Students have long prepared for the rite of passage known as the gap year and it has become very important to many young people. Firstly, it gives them on many occasions an opportunity to grow up a little as they prepare to move away from home for the first time and have to live in the cities to undertake a university education. Some may get a breadth of experience which helps them choose the kind of tertiary education they may want.

The rules that are being imposed under the new arrangements for independent youth allowance are very difficult to fulfil if you live in a country community. It might be all right in the minister’s city where there are plenty of jobs—where there are opportunities to work 30 hours a week, regularly, as is required by the new arrangements—but, when you get into a country town, those jobs are not there. The people who qualified for the independent youth allowance often did so by doing seasonal work—by working at fruit picking, contract harvesting or in a mine for a brief period. They worked to collect enough money to qualify. They cannot do it by regular 30 hour a week jobs, because they are simply not there.

Frankly, nothing that the Minister for Social Inclusion is doing in relation to industrial relations reform and the state of the national economy is going to make more jobs available for the young people who need them. The Senate had no choice but to vote down the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2]. The bill meant students would have to have worked a 30 hour week over 18 months in a two-year period to qualify for independent youth allowance. That is a prospect that is simply impossible in many regional areas. Jobs just do not grow on trees—something we are increasingly discovering under this job-destroying government.

The coalition is not going to support legislation that retrospectively disadvantages 25,000 students who want to start university at the beginning of next year. The bill is in the government’s court. Whether the scholarships go ahead in 2010 is completely in the hands of the government and the Australian Labor Party. You can fix it tonight. You could have fixed it before now, when you redrafted this legislation to bring it into the parliament. You could so easily have fixed it, but you were not prepared to do it. The government can split the bill and receive our support for the positive proposals that it puts before the chamber, or it can take this matter to an election and see what the people think about it.

The minister in her speech quoted a number of people who are allegedly supporting her proposals. They are the usual people you would expect to be supporting anything that the Labor Party proposes. I thought I would read to you an email that one of my colleagues received just a few days ago about this particular issue. He said:

I know that rural students will never recover from bad policy that limits their tertiary options. The current government policy is bad policy and I am delighted to see that you and your party continue to argue against it. Although I have never applied for or obtained Centrelink assistance for my tertiary studies (preferring to work my behind off in part-time employment) I know of many students who are here at James Cook University, and from Childers, who would not be studying Pharmacy, Science, Journalism and even Medicine if not for the assistance that is provided through the youth allowance. I am de-
lighted to see the National Party going in to bat for
the bush on this very important issue.

He goes on in that vein. This is a practical
element of a real student, not a union mem-
ber or an academic. This is somebody who is
working his way, hard, through university to
obtain a qualification. Minister, I suggest you
listen to the students. You should listen to the
young people. You should listen to those who
are affected by your legislation—and soften
your heart. Remember the country students,
the people who will miss out on the opportu-
nity to break clear of the educational disad-
vantage that besets many in their community,
and help them build a better career for them-
selves and their families. Minister, do the
right thing. Do the right thing for Australian
students and provide an education support
system that will deliver an education for so
many people who need it and want it.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (6.34 pm)—I
have changed my position on this after a
great deal of consideration, and I will bend
the knee to no man. My children are the sixth
generation to be living in country Australia.
My father worked for 18 months to two
years before he went away to university. I
worked for 18 months to two years before I
went away to university. My son worked for
two years before he went away to university.
If you want to go to university, you work to
earn it.

A shortage of jobs has not been my ex-
perience in country areas. My experience is
that in country areas we are desperately seek-
ing people for poorly paid jobs, not the high-
paying jobs. If kids are prepared to do those
jobs, there is work there for them. That is
one element of it. The sister of Tanya Pascoe,
a member of my staff, was married to a cane
farmer who had terrible times in the cane
industry. I find the comments of the previous
speaker, the Leader of the Nationals, quite
amazing. He was the Deputy Prime Minister
of Australia when the government fell. There
were 40 per cent fewer people going on to
complete secondary education—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr KATTER—I stand corrected. He was
the second-ranking person in the National
Party when the government fell. They were
there for 13 years and at the end of 13 years
40 per cent fewer country people went on to
complete secondary education. I would point
out that the honourable member for Wide
Bay is laughing.

Mr Truss—It is 11 years!

Mr KATTER—Eleven years, whatever. I
am sorry I said 13 when it was 11 years! Af-
ter 11 years of you in government, 40 per
cent fewer people went on to complete their
secondary education and then a further 40
per cent fewer people went on to complete
tertiary education. And you have the hide to
come into this place and say, ‘Where is your
heart?’ I will say ‘Where was your heart
when you concluded your time in office as
agriculture minister; every four days a
farmer in Australia was committing sui-
cide—where was your heart?’

Mr Truss—Madam Deputy Speaker, I
rise on a point of order as to relevance, but
also the remark was offensive. To suggest
that I was responsible for—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE
Burke)—The member for Wide Bay will
resume his seat. The member for Kennedy
has the call. The member for Kennedy will
withdraw, please.

Mr KATTER—Withdraw what, Madam
Deputy Speaker?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The refer-
ce to suicide.

Mr KATTER—No, I just quoted a figure.
I did not attribute it to him. I just quoted a
figure.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—If you are
not attributing that is fine.
Mr KATTER—I most certainly say that I did not attribute it to him. I just said that at the conclusion of his time in office that was the figure.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Thank you.

Mr KATTER—If someone wants to say the figure is not correct, that is up to them.

Mr Pyne—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I, as much as anybody, am very patient with the member for Kennedy, but he did make it very clear that he was suggesting that when the member for Wide Bay was a minister he had something to do with suicides—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—the member for Sturt and Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The member for Kennedy would assist by just saying he withdraws and then we can progress with this important debate.

Mr KATTER—for the sake of getting on with this I withdraw whatever it is that offended these people.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Thank you.

Mr KATTER—Tanya Pascoe simply rang me up and said, ‘Next year I will have two children going to university. My husband is an independent builder. We don’t make a lot of money. I work here to try to supplement that.’ Her five kids are tramping in and out of our office all the time and it gives me very great joy to have them tramping in and out of our office as we all love the Pascoe kids. She said, ‘I desperately need that $4,000 and the only way that I can get it is if this legislation is passed.’ I am not some big-time politician coming here knowing all about everything. Here is a woman, a very intelligent lady, who has gone into it and that is what she is saying. She is saying, ‘If you vote for this I get the $4,000. If you don’t I don’t. There have got to be thousands of people in your electorate in this situation.’ So it is about $4,000 plus $1,000 a year. I think there is merit and integrity in some of the arguments coming from the opposition on this, and I want to put that on record. I do think that there needs to be a little bit more liberalisation of the means test and the employment test, so I would add that to my remarks. All I can say is I have a person who assures me that there are thousands in my electorate in this situation. This is a very intelligent lady, and her daughter is doing medicine at the university, which I am not surprised by. She works like a dog and her husband works like a dog to try to help these kids to get a better way of life. She would not be making a mistake on this issue. That is a person speaking from the heart.

Mr HAASE—(Kalgoorlie) (6.40 pm)—I rise because I feel very strongly about this situation and I am offended by the legislation proposed by the minister. But that is not important. What is most important is that my constituents and their children are offended by this legislation, the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2]. We have a minister who espouses ad nauseam that she is understanding of regional and remote Australia and the needs of its population, yet the very legislation that she proposes, to alter the status quo, will disadvantage children in my electorate. We have constantly agreed that one of the great problems in residing in rural and remote Australia is the lack of professional services, and we in the previous government certainly went to great lengths to provide medical services, GP services, in rural and remote Australia. We went to great lengths to provide medical scholarships for those from the bush who would qualify for tertiary education and spend their time at university in the hope that, with their understanding of living in regional and remote
Australia, they would be more likely to return so that we could ease the pressure we place on overseas countries in taking doctors from those countries where the ratio of doctors to population is often poorer than it is in our own nation.

Yet we have a minister who proposes in this place that we accept legislation that will cut off one of the main sources of potential professionals in the bush by preventing their access to tertiary education. I say ‘preventing’ because there is a lot of smoke and mirrors in this proposition and the minister makes much of the fact that she is providing an opportunity for many more Australians to access youth allowance and go to university. That may be so and I believe that a particular report tabled and made available to her indicated that there was a degree of unfortunate rorting by those families or individuals that lived in the city, lived within reasonable daily access of university and yet qualified for the independent youth allowance by the student working for about 18 months at about 15 hours a week. So they qualified and then they continued to live at home whilst accessing the independent youth allowance and catching public transport to attend the university of their choice. That is an undesirable situation for any government to provide support for. But there was no need for this minister to throw the baby out with the bathwater. All she needed to do was put in place checks and balances that would apply to those that lived at home, were not truly living an independent lifestyle and were getting all the luxuries of living within easy access of a tertiary institution. She could have separated those out of the mix very easily but chose not to do so.

I am left with no choice but to decide that, while this was not an act of retribution against the bush, either it was simply ignorance or incompetence or it was simply a city slicker’s fuzzy-headed lack of understanding.

I do not know where this minister gets off in her lack of understanding of the reality. The reality is that if you are a city kid and you live at home and you qualify to attend a tertiary institution, and your parents are earning an income greater than that which would allow you to get the full youth allowance, you have two choices. You can get a small part-time job, stay with your peer group that you have attended secondary school with, go on to university and live a fairly reasonable life. You are with your peer group; it makes uni a lot easier. You are within cooee and public transport access of the institution of your choice. It makes it very easy. You live at home, off mum and dad very typically, and life is very easy. You work a few hours a week and you pick up some spending money.

Compare that situation to that of a child living in rural and remote Australia, where there is not the 30 hours work a week, there is not 30 hours work available to those students, so they cannot qualify for the independent youth allowance. This minister would have us believe that mum and dad will not have to provide now because she has extended the cap for obtaining youth allowance out to $44,000. I would love you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to show me a family living and surviving in rural and remote Australia, especially in my patch, where their family income is less than $44,000 per annum. Go to Karratha and a three-by-one accommodation will cost you between $1,600 and $2,000 a week. So to suggest that these incomes have been pushed out to a cap of $44,000 and that that will allow so many more people to get youth allowance is an absolute nonsense. It is irrelevant. It just proves the ignorance.

So we have to fall back on independent youth allowance, and for all of those students who in the last 12 or 18 months have taken a gap year from university and look forward to attending in the first semester of this coming
year, the legislation proposed by this member will simply destroy their hopes. And if they have to take a second gap year between secondary college and tertiary education, those country kids will simply never attend tertiary education. The supply of ready graduates to come back and reside in rural and remote Australia with a profession, that opportunity, that conduit, has been trashed. It has been trashed either by the fuzzy, city slicker attitude of this minister or by total ignorance. And there I rest my case.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (6.47 pm)—The title of this bill is the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2]. What the opposition is doing is in actual fact denying income support for thousands and thousands more students who would be eligible for income support under the new arrangements. That is at the heart of what is going on here. I have heard those opposite go on about retrospectivity. I know that the member for Kalgoorlie and others spoke about this earlier in this debate, and I was also one of those who had issues with retrospectivity. The minister knows that and I have spoken to the minister, as have many of my colleagues. The retrospectivity aspect has been fixed, so I do not know what the issue is about that matter. It has been fixed at $150,000, and it has been transitioned for 12 months. And for the benefit of the member for Kalgoorlie and others spoke about this earlier in this debate, and I was also one of those who had issues with retrospectivity. The minister knows that and I have spoken to the minister, as have many of my colleagues. The retrospectivity aspect has been fixed, so I do not know what the issue is about that matter. It has been fixed at $150,000, and it has been transitioned for 12 months. And for the benefit of the member for Kalgoorlie—I want him to hear this—those people with incomes above $150,000 living at home and accessing education in their direct district are not eligible in the transition period. This is to support those who were going to be affected by the retrospectivity and at the same time make it fair and equitable. I do not know why those on the other side have been banging on about this, but it is incorrect. It is not fair, so at least deal with the facts of the matter.

The other thing that we should be aware of is, yes, you can cite people who were very pleased with the old system because they have benefited from it greatly, particularly those living at home and those living in the metropolitan areas, and also those living in rural and regional areas with parents on very high incomes. I join the member for Kalgoorlie, if he said that was unfair, because that is unfair.

Mr Haase—And should have been fixed.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And indeed should have been fixed up in the past by those on that side when they were in government, and I commend the member for Kalgoorlie on that. We are trying to bring equity to this.

But I want to tell you I also have information from families who would have benefited under our system, these amended changes, and who are absolutely distraught that those opposite are not supporting it. So I want you to know—these are direct facts; I did not make this up—they have made decisions now and they are going to have to continue on their path. They have to take accommodation in Hobart, where they have to move to for their university studies. They have to sign those bonds now and they are lost in limbo because of what those opposite are doing, so I want those opposite to take that on board as well.

The minister has pointed out some of the figures which those opposite cannot deny in relation to those who are going to be seriously affected by the fact that the opposition will not support this legislation, along with Senator Fielding in the other house. If passed, the changes in the government’s amendments would have seen more than 100,000 students, and their families, better off. That is 100,000 students better off with either more youth allowance or youth allowance to some degree. One hundred and fifty thousand students would have received a
$1,434 start-up scholarship in 2010, rising to $2,254 in 2011, but now they will miss out. So these are the facts that are being affected by the opposition and Senator Fielding’s opposition in the other house.

The government had agreed to a total of three sensible amendments, following negotiations in good faith with the Greens and supported by Senator Nick Xenophon, which would have dealt with any remaining concerns about current gap year students which I have just mentioned. I think that was only fair and I thank the minister for listening to those concerns raised by many members, on both this side and the other side of the House. But what have we got? We have them playing politics and, in the process, they are going to punish students and families such as the one that communicated with me today, including those students on a gap year who will not receive the scholarships. So that is a double whammy.

Those opposite had the opportunity to agree to a historic change to youth allowance. The member for Kalgoorlie pointed out that the previous allowance system which allowed so many more people to rort the system desperately needed change. That is all it was—a good old rort—and we know it. It should have been dealt with. The member for Sturt—he has more front than Myer, frankly—comes in here talking about how he can do us a favour if we separate these bills and the Commonwealth scholarships, which, by the way, the member for Sturt and all those opposite voted for earlier in the year in the budget measures. That is how much of a grasp he has of his portfolio. All he really wants to do is score a few points against an excellent minister whom he cannot match in any way or form either in this place or outside of it. That is his problem.

Let me just go over in the short time available to me—there are colleagues who want to contribute to this debate—the seven major negatives visited upon us and upon the family I mentioned in Ulveston in my electorate because of the opposition in the other house along with Senator Fielding and led by the member for Sturt. I do not know what he is leading and how many there are to lead on this, but let me have a look at the seven. More than 150,000 students across Australia will not receive the start-up scholarship. That is fact. There were 21,000 existing Commonwealth scholarships voted out of existence earlier in the year which the opposition supported—the member for Sturt should remember that, as he supported this—meaning no scholarships are being paid by the Commonwealth in 2010. More than 100,000 students across Australia will get less or no youth allowance in 2010—a mere 100,000. Students who choose to move to study will not be eligible for a $4,000 relocation scholarship in 2010. Many students from my electorate who would have benefited from the new parental income threshold will now be able to go and access these scholarships. Students with very high parental incomes will continue to receive youth allowance. So the member for Sturt has got what he wanted.

The continuation of the rort includes 18 per cent of students receiving youth allowance from families with incomes of more than $150,000, 10 per cent of students receiving youth allowance from families with incomes above $200,000 and three per cent from families with incomes above $300,000. For heaven’s sake, what are we doing here? This is immoral, but you continue it with your recalcitrance in the Senate and you allow this immorality, this rort, to continue—all for the sake of your petty vanity.

Mr Pyne—Did you write that one down?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Indeed, and you can copy it too. I really look forward to the
member for Riverina having some substance in her argument instead of rhetoric I have listened to for the last few years. I really look forward to it. Go ahead and explain to us how you are going to continue the rort system. The parental income test will remain at $32,800, so students with parents earning more than this will continue to lose youth allowance. We were raising it from $32,800 to $44,165. It will include many more low-income families in Braddon. I know such families exist for many members here, particularly in regional and rural Australia. The age of independence will remain at 25 years rather than be lowered to 22 years by 2012, which would have seen an estimated 7,600 new recipients of the independent rate of allowance across Australia.

I ask those opposite to really consider the hundreds of thousands of students who will be negatively impacted if they do not support these amendments, which have been agreed to by the Greens and Senator Xenophon. At the same time, I ask those opposite to take on board the comments made particularly on the issue of retrospectivity. I ask you to consider what you are doing for hundreds of thousands of families.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (6.57 pm)—I rise to speak on the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2] with sadness at the way in which politics has been significantly played on this issue and the way in which insults and disgraceful comments have been made in this chamber about people. It is terribly distressing when there is a true intent on this issue by me and those who represent the students who will not qualify for the start-up scholarship, who will not qualify for the relocation scholarship of $4,000 and who will not qualify for the $1,000 each year following. These students are not able to get two years full-time work to be able to qualify for what is on offer here. I have never said and never put a position that many of these measures are not good measures. That has never been stated by me. I can stand in this House and honestly say, with my hand on my heart, that I have not had any contact with anybody who has indicated they are distraught because of my feelings or because of what the opposition is doing. Nobody has contacted me and said, ‘Please don’t do this,’ or, ‘Please see our side,’ or, ‘I am distraught because I’m not going to get this scholarship’. It is the biggest issue I have ever had through my electorate office. Not only is it the biggest issue I have ever had but it is the biggest issue that I continue to have—it is an ongoing issue.

The students are not stupid. We have some comments and political jargon exchanged across the House—you understand that, you accept that and that is what you are here for. Sometimes it is good-natured and sometimes it is just banter, and there will be disagreements. But it is sad to think that all of those kids who came and explained their position before the Senate committee are being categorised in this bundle of so-called ‘idiots’ on this side of the House who do not understand. These kids out there and their families who are contacting us do understand. They have everything in front of them to understand. They have nothing hidden.

This is a public place. Everything that the minister says at the dispatch box and everything that the minister has set out in the legislation is available for all to see. This is not a conspiracy that has happened on the opposition side where we are keeping everyone in the dark and only feeding them certain amounts of information. In fact, until the last week or two, I have provided no information. I have just made representations on behalf of these people. But now I keep the people who have contacted me on a database and I keep them apprised of every single thing that happens. On the minister’s side, I keep them
apprised and say, ‘This is what the minister has offered, this is what she has discussed and this is the state of play.’ I keep them apprised of what is happening in the Senate. But they come back and they are still of the same mind. They are not stupid. You can call us stupid; you can call me stupid; you can make out that we have no idea what we are doing and we have it all wrong. But these people have all of the information that the minister has made available and they are still there. They are still coming back and it has not satisfied them.

One of the young girls who appeared before the inquiry sent a letter to members of parliament. I will not mention the young girl’s name, but I will read the letter.

Dear Members of Parliament,

I am extremely disappointed with the decision of the Parliament to refuse to adopt the Senate Amendments to the Government’s Youth Allowance legislation. I and my friends appeared before the Senate Review Committee and were very hopeful that the concerns we had were adopted in the amendments. It has been difficult to get our message across as we have been studying and doing exams at this time.

As an HSC Student I appreciate the Government’s efforts in altering the criteria and extending the allowance to more people but believe this has also disadvantaged students such as myself who have to leave home to study and are ineligible for the full youth allowance because my parents earn more than $32,800 per annum.

I strongly believe that working 30 hours a week in a two year period to become an independent student is detrimental to regional and remote students being able to attend university.

As a student from a regional area I will have to move to a larger centre at least three hours away to attend university. I intend to study as an early childhood or primary school teacher.

I have a job for nine months next year as a governess in the Northern Territory. Under the proposed legislation I would not qualify as an independent student, although for nine months, I will be 3,000 Kilometers from home and working more than 30 hours a week.

Unfortunately there is no employment for 30 hours a week in my small home town, I will have to move to a larger centre and will find it difficult to get a position with the few qualifications and skills that I have. I have been working casually, waitressing, teaching swimming and babysitting but this would not qualify as 30 hours a week employment.

My parents have supported me during my schooling and will continue to support me with car fuel, registration and maintenance as well as help with my accommodation fees as they have with my two older sisters. I will continue to work casually as well. Living away from home to study is expensive and many of my rural friends struggle to do this, it will be even harder for us all without the support of Youth Allowance.

I repeat: it is fantastic that there are start-up scholarships. It is great to see changes made to youth allowance—and, yes, criteria needed to be tightened. There is no doubt about that, but what we are asking for is as simple as this: to give another option to those students who cannot find 30 hours a week of full-time work for 18 months in their town. For example, they may do three harvests if they are from a rural community with no shops or businesses in the town that they can find employment at, which applies to many students in my electorate. They may do three different harvests, but that is not counted as full-time work. That may have been what they were doing before that enabled them to earn that amount of money, but they were still able to live at home in order to do this or they could travel and perhaps stay with friends or something.

This is not the time for name-calling and accusations across the House. It is the time for sensible understanding of what we are saying. I do not dispute that what other people are suggesting in this House are good measures. For the people who currently qualify for the youth allowance, it is great—they
have a grand future—but, for the people who do not qualify and cannot qualify because of the restrictions that the bill places on them, I have major concerns. I should not have to be blackmailed in this place and I should not have to be exposed to ridiculous propaganda poked into my electorate—which of course gives me no pain because the editors do not even run it. I should not have to be subjected to that when all I am asking for is a reality check. All I am asking for is that, in the interests of the kids I represent, I have their voices heard. It should not come down to the ridiculous measure that is being undertaken at this moment. There should be a way in which we can work our way through it, so that we can be heard and there can be some understanding.

When I looked the comments that the so-called amendments that were put up by the coalition and which were supported in the Senate would blow a billion-dollar hole in the budget, I felt revoltingly sick. We have got a billion-dollar blow-out—hello—in the budget as a result of a whole host of measures that I could stand here and fire across, which seems to be pointless for me to do. We are investing in our children’s future. We are asking for an investment in the future of all children, not just some. We are asking for you to pick up the forgotten students in rural and regional Australia who also have an entitlement to an education. We are asking about an investment. If it did cost $1 billion, I believe that investment would be a sensational investment in the future youth of Australia.

Ms Gillard interjecting—

Mrs HULL—Minister, you carp enough, thanks. It is my chance. You stood at that dispatch box—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! The member for Riverina and the Deputy Prime Minister need to understand that we adjourn at 7.30.

Mrs HULL—The minister stood at the dispatch box. She has her say on this all of the time, and I am comfortable with that, but I am entitled to have a say for the people I represent as well. I intend to have that say. I am asking for some sensibility in this. I am asking that the young people who do not qualify for youth allowance, do not qualify for the relocation scholarship, do not qualify for the start-up scholarship et cetera be given thought and consideration because they are the ones who will be relegated to no-man’s land through this. We should sincerely understand how this has impacted.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7.10 pm)—I rise in support of the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2]. I wish to begin by making a few observations in relation to the speech given by the member for Riverina. I certainly do not doubt the member for Riverina’s passion in trying to represent the interests of residents in her electorate, but even with the particular example that she brought forward we see an incorrect statement—an incorrect assumption of fact. That incorrect assumption of fact was the cut-out for the youth allowance. The figure of $32,000 was used. In the same way as I recognise the great work that members in this place do in communicating with their electorate, in the way that the member for Riverina has suggested, I would hope that the member for Riverina would take seriously her obligation to ensure that her constituents are properly informed about the matters that are being debated in this place. If she took that obligation seriously, which I am sure she would not fail to do deliberately, then she would point out to her constituent that, as a consequence of the changes proposed in this bill, that threshold will be increased. The significance of that is not lost on me in a community where there are many families who will benefit greatly from these
measures. I represent an electorate where the median household income is $62,000. There is no doubt in my mind that there are many families in my electorate who will be positively affected by these changes.

What we are seeing here is a measure, along with a whole raft of other measures, that actually provides people with opportunities to get a tertiary education and relieves some of the financial burden of tertiary study. No-one is choosing to defend the regime that those opposite left us—the legacy. I think it was the President of the NUS who called it an ‘iniquitous legacy’—I think those were his words. They choose to not defend that, but they also choose to not put forward budget-neutral proposals. The member for Riverina says, ‘Let’s spend $1 billion. Those on the other side want to quibble about a couple of dollars here and a couple of dollars there.’ We are the government that are taking this country into great debt, so they tell us—the lowest net debt of any advanced economy in the world. They have a preoccupation with debt—they want to run fear and smear campaigns on debt—but, when it comes to throwing another $1 billion at the problem, then people suggest that is the responsible course. It is not the responsible course. Those on the other side have not come forward, particularly some regional and rural members, and say, ‘It’s terrible. Look at the state of access to education for people in rural and regional areas.’ And that is a shameful legacy. But at least now they have the good sense to come forward and acknowledge this, and I think the member for Kennedy pointed that out very robustly.

My predecessor, the former member for Lindsay, once famously said that no-one in her electorate goes to university and no-one in her electorate wants to go to university. She was out of touch when she said that, but views like that no doubt inform the sort of policy that led to many people from working families being excluded—or maybe not being excluded, but having their job of going to university made even more difficult. That, in part, is why participation rates in higher education have not improved in the way in which people in the region I represent want to see. So I am very proud to support this bill and I say to those on the other side: do what students all around this country need you to do this week to ensure that they will be able to begin the university year next year on a solid footing to go on, get an education and make a great contribution to our community.

Mrs Hull interjecting—

Mr BRADBURY—Well, if they do not qualify it does not cut out at the full amount. You do not lose your youth allowance at $40,000. It is graduated. In fact, the taper rate has been softened under these proposals, which expands access to youth allowance to a greater number of people.

There are many good reasons why this bill needs to be passed—there are the relocation scholarships, there is the fairer parental income test and there are the changes to the age test—but I will finish by making this observation: those on the other side come forward, particularly some regional and rural members, and say, ‘It’s terrible. Look at the state of access to education for people in rural and regional areas.’ And that is a shameful legacy. But at least now they have the good sense to come forward and acknowledge this, and I think the member for Kennedy pointed that out very robustly.

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Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (7.16 pm)—In my view the Social Security and Other Leg-
islation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2009 [No. 2] must be passed. We are at a time right now when we have two options in the raw politics of it: this either flies or dies. If it dies, that is at the expense of many students around Australia who do not deserve to be the victims of a poor first lesson in civics from this place and from the other place. My message in raw politics tonight is not necessarily to other members of this chamber; it is to someone who is just sitting up there and watching: it is to Senator Fielding in the other place. He has a critical role to play in the future payments for students wanting to go to university next year. I ask him to look deep into his soul and think very deeply about what decisions he makes on this legislation when it is next presented.

This is not perfect legislation. There are still issues around the ability of regional students to get access to university in Australia, but the targets are good. The broad target from this government—about 20 per cent of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds accessing university in the future—is a good, noble target that I hope has the support of everyone. The target of 40 per cent of students aged between 25 and 34 years having a bachelor’s degree or higher by the year 2025 is a good, noble target. The spin that this legislation is somehow putting a knife through the want for education and the aspiration for education in this country is wrong. This is a reform package that, on merit and on balance, we should support as a parliament. It is not perfect. There are still issues around retrospectivity with regard to current university students who chose to go to university in 2009 and are still trying to apply for youth allowance. They are collateral damage in this. No-one can say there has been a 100 per cent end to issues around retrospectivity. There is still the issue of people who are being left behind.

But, like the member for Braddon, many members in this place fought the good fight. To the Deputy Prime Minister’s credit, she listened to concerns about the 150,000 students who took a gap year and were potentially going to be collateral damage in this as well. To everyone’s credit, and as a good first lesson in civics, it was a successful exercise for some very engaging 18- and 19-year-olds who came down to this place, presented their message, had the minister listen and saw changes made. That affects 150,000 students around this country for the better. So the majority of the retrospectivity issues are resolved. There still is that issue of those who did go to university this year and are applying for youth allowance now. I hope that can be considered moving forward.

Having gone through this place a couple of times now, this legislation has added benefits for those who are still opposing it to consider. There is the review that was picked up in the Senate. That was a good review and a good initiative, and I hope everyone engages in it and tries to get better reforms in the future. Also, the averaging out of the 30 hours, rather than there being a blanket cut-off at 30 hours, is a small win for regional areas—it is not the whole win. I do pick up the comments from the member for Riverina. It is an issue that is a burner and I hope the minister keeps an eye on it and, if it is creating problems, that she can address those problems. But on balance this is good reform. It is not an exercise of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. For regional areas such as mine—predominantly lower socioeconomic regions—this overall package is one that deserves support. I ask the coalition to consider their position on that and, in particular, I ask Senator Fielding to reconsider his position.

Yes, we can do better. No, it is not perfect. But it is an improvement on where we have been. Representing an area where one in six...
school leavers go on to university, I think we can do a lot better than we have been doing. From my perspective, in my region we have got absolutely nothing to lose in a reform program. I want it to be better. It looks as if it can be better. I hope it can be better. I hope the minister and the government stay engaged if issues do emerge once this reform package is on the ground. But I say to all the members in this place who are taking a position of opposition on this: it is now down to the raw politics of the next 48 hours. There are two choices: you support this and we get it through this place and we get people getting paid and going to university next year, or we do not. I do not want to be part of a parliament that makes many people change their decisions for next year about going to university. I hope everyone thinks about that when they vote; and if they are going to oppose this then it is on their head.

Question put:

That the words proposed to be omitted (Mr Pyne’s amendment) stand part of the question.

The House divided. [7.26 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

Ayes............ 74
Noes............ 56
Majority........ 18

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bidgood, J. Bird, S.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.S.
Butler, M.C. Byrne, A.M.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Collins, J.M.
Combet, G. Crean, S.F.
D’Ath, Y.M. Danby, M.
Debus, B. Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J. Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A. Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P. Georganas, S.
George, J. Gibbons, S.W.
Gillard, J.E. Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P. Hall, J.G. *
Irwin, J. Katter, R.C.
Kerr, D.J.C. Livermore, K.F.
Marles, R.D. McKew, M.
Melham, D. Neumann, S.K.
Oakeshott, R.J.M. Parke, M.
Price, L.R.S. Rea, K.M.
Rishworth, A.L. Saffin, J.A.
Sidebottom, S. Sullivan, J.
Tanner, L. Thomson, K.J.
Turnour, J.P. Windsor, A.H.C.

NOES

Abbott, A.J. Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F. Bishop, B.K.
Briggs, J.E. Chester, D.
Cobb, J.K. Dutton, P.C.
Gash, J. Haase, B.W.
Hawke, A. Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A. Jensen, D.
Keenan, M. Ley, S.P.
Macfarlane, I.E. Markus, L.E.
Morrison, S.J. Pearce, C.J.
Ramsey, R. Robert, S.R.
Schultz, A. Secker, P.D.
Slipper, P.N. Somlyay, A.M.
Stone, S.N. Tuckey, C.W.
Washer, M.J. Griffin, A.P. *
Hale, D.F. Hayes, C.P. *
Jackson, S.M. Kelly, M.J.
King, C.F. Macklin, J.L.
McClelland, R.B. McMullan, R.F.
Murphy, J. O’Connor, B.P.
Owens, J. Perrett, G.D.
Raguse, B.B. Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L. Shorten, W.R.
Snowdon, W.E. Symon, M.
Thomson, C. Trevor, C.
Vamvakianou, M. Zappia, A.

Andrews, K.J. Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F. Broadbent, R.
Ciobo, S.M. Coulton, M.
Forrest, J.A. Georgiou, P.
Hartsuyker, L. Hawker, D.P.M.
Hull, K.E. * Irons, S.J.
Johnson, M.A. * Laming, A.
Lindsay, P.J. Marino, N.B.
May, M.A. Moylan, J.E.
Pyne, C. Robb, A.
Ruddock, P.M. Scott, B.C.
Simpkins, L. Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J. Truss, W.E.
Vale, D.S. Wood, I.
Question agreed to.

Original question put: That this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [7.33 pm]
(The Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

**AYES**

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**NOES**

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Third Reading

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Work-
place Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (7.35 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being after 7.30 pm, I propose the question:
That the House do now adjourn.

Communism

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (7.36 pm)—The year 2009 has been one of many anniversaries: the 80th anniversary of the Wall Street crash, the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II and the 40th anniversary of the moon landing. But this year is historically important because of two other anniversaries. On 1 October 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the People’s Republic of China at Tiananmen in Beijing. Mao was then a loyal ally of Stalin and the Soviet Union, and it looked as if the march of communism across the world would be unstoppable. But, just over 40 years later, in November 1989, the whole edifice of the Soviet Union came crashing down.

The iconic moment in the stirring events of 1989 was the opening of the Berlin Wall. A little remembered politburo spokesman Gunther Schabowski, who muddled his lines, was probably responsible for it as much as anything. The opening of the wall led very rapidly to the fall of the regime in East Germany. Next, the Bulgarian communist party exited history a few days later. At the end of November, 20 years ago this week, came the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia where that great democrat Vaclav Havel led a democratic revolution. In December of that year the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his feared Securitate were overthrown, and Ceausescu was executed.

Meanwhile, the economic and political system of communism in the Soviet Union itself was crumbling. Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika, his attempt at reform, led only to a more rapid demise. At the end of 1991 the Soviet Union was officially dissolved and its 15 republics became independent states. Two relics of the Stalinist system survive—the impoverished outposts of Cuba and North Korea, where the Castro brothers and the Kim dynasty cling to the power. In Vietnam and Laos there are communist regimes that have survived by allowing just enough economic reform to create modest prosperity that keeps the people from revolting.

The great survivor of communist politics has been the Chinese Communist Party, which celebrated 60 years in power with a grandiose military parade and self congratulatory speeches, apparently as firmly in the saddle as ever. In 1949, China was a land in ruins after decades of warfare, apparently destined to permanent dependence on the Soviet Union. But the People’s Republic has outlived the Soviet Union by nearly 20 years and appears stronger than ever. The key to this apparent paradox is another anniversary. Thirty years ago, in 1979, Deng Xiaoping began a sweeping economic liberalisation of the Chinese economy. We all remember his famous saying: ‘It is glorious to grow rich.’ Agriculture was decollectivised and farmers were allowed to sell their produce. In a country which was 80 per cent agricultural, this led to a rapid rise in living standards and set off a chain reaction of further reform. Capitalism and foreign investment were reintroduced and a new middle-class consumer society was born in China’s booming cities. Deng and his successors have been adamant that economic reform will not be accompanied by political reform. China’s communists showed that with the Tiananmen Square massacre, whose 20th anniversary we marked in June.
The Chinese Communist rulers in Beijing are riding a tiger that they dare not dismount. The Chinese people have been willing to put up with a lack of political freedom so long as the regime continues to deliver ever rising living standards. This is becoming increasingly difficult as the economy comes up against the constraints imposed by the strictures of economic and political power. These include state control of banking and credit, the overvaluation of its currency, a 17 per cent exponential growth in military expenditure, corruption, inefficiency and the arrogance of the party and its bureaucracy.

We may not see a moment as electrifying as the fall of the Berlin Wall in China any time soon. Chinese history moves at its own pace. But as good Marxists, the Chinese leaders know that history also has its own inevitable laws which cannot be ignored forever. The so-called market communism of the past 20 years is not sustainable in the long run. As Gorbachev discovered, there is no sustainable halfway house between communism and capitalism; between dictatorship and democracy. Eventually the Chinese people will choose another form of political system. I doubt that they will choose to go back to the dark days before 1979.

Petitions: Digital Television

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (7.41 pm)—I rise to present petitions from two parts of my electorate, Yankalilla district and Gumeracha district, in relation to the Rudd government’s complete disregard for their right to have television services after 2013. The first petition is from the Yankalilla district.

The petition read as follows—
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
This petition of Yankalilla district residents and certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House concerns about the switchover to digital television expected to take place in 2013. The Yankalilla region currently has limited digital signal and poor analogue reception. Under these circumstances and with the lack of information regarding blackspot funding, residents are concerned they will not receive an upgrade to digital television and will be left without television.
We therefore ask the House to consider urgent funding for an upgrade to digital television in the Yankalilla area and a guarantee from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy that the residents of the district will receive digital television.
from 712 citizens
Petition received.

Mr BRIGGS—the second petition is from the Gumeracha district.
The petition read as follows—
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
This petition of Gumeracha district residents and certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House concerns about the switchover to digital television expected to take place in 2013. The Gumeracha region currently has limited digital signal and poor analogue reception. Under these circumstances and with the lack of information regarding blackspot funding, residents are concerned they will not receive an upgrade to digital television and will be left without television.
We therefore ask the House to consider urgent funding for an upgrade to digital television in the Gumeracha area and a guarantee from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy that the residents of the district will receive digital television.
from 164 citizens
Petition received.

Mr BRIGGS—While I support the switch over from analog TV to digital TV, what is occurring with the switch over to digital TV is that the Rudd government—and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy in particular—is failing to
provide for those communities that have television reception difficulties and which have previously had alternative solutions. I will talk briefly about each district separately.

Yankallila district, as members of this House may be aware, is a very hilly district and for a long time has had issues with television reception. In fact, it only started getting regular television signals in the late 1980s after the council put together enough money to build the required towers to service the area. We now have the issue that those towers will not be upgraded unless the Rudd government and this minister develop a black spots type program, which would be implemented as part of the digital switch over. And I think a very important program too if I may say in the sense that these days television is a right for people. We would all expect to have the opportunity to get our television. I think that this government at this stage is not paying enough care to those areas which it knows have a problem.

There are two types of problems with the digital switchover. There is the tyranny of distance in Australia, which we are seeing with the initial trial in Mildura right now where a satellite service is being trialled to cover large amounts of area. Being from there originally, I understand the challenges. However, in Yankallila and Gumeracha the issue is simply that the towers need to be upgraded. The towers and the infrastructure are already there. This government could upgrade those services today. They know the problems there. The excuse of the minister that we need to consider how the trials go in Mildura just does not add up because the minister knows that he can fix the problem today and give certainty to these people.

There is so much anger about this issue. We had a public meeting in Yankallila but unfortunately it appeared that every Labor member in South Australia and the minister had something on that night and could not make it down to the meeting. Instead, they sent a bureaucrat to face an angry crowd of about 300 people who just want certainty about their television services, which is completely understandable. They want to know that they can see the Adelaide Crows or Port Power, if that is their choice, on a Friday or Saturday night. It would be a game government that would prevent a community from being able to access those sorts of services.

I am sure that in the end the government will fund these towers. However, the issue is that it should happen today. People should be given the certainty today. It would be good for the switchover. It would create an increased pace that would take away a problem. We have a farcical situation now where people in Yankallila and Gumeracha see the ads, go out and buy big, new flatscreen TVs, get home and cannot use them because there is no digital signal. All it would take is a simple program from this government, a well-thought-through program rather than the rushed decision making that we see, which would allow these people to have certainty that they will have their digital television services going forward from 2013.

I am sure that in the end the government will fund these towers. However, the issue is that it should happen today. People should be given the certainty today. It would be good for the switchover. It would create an increased pace that would take away a problem. We have a farcical situation now where people in Yankallila and Gumeracha see the ads, go out and buy big, new flatscreen TVs, get home and cannot use them because there is no digital signal. All it would take is a simple program from this government, a well-thought-through program rather than the rushed decision making that we see, which would allow these people to have cer-
tainty that they will have their digital television services going forward from 2013.

We know that the government is going to make many billions of dollars out of the sale of the spectrum and we see that as a sword above the head of Telstra. Another bill before the Senate that we have debated in this House means that that spectrum will be worth a large amount of money when the analog signal is turned off. So they know that they are going to have the money. They could develop a black spots program. I congratulate Senator Minchin, our leader in the other place, for the work he has been doing on this issue as the communications spokesman.

This petition of 712 signatures from Yankalilla and 164 from the small town of Gumeracha shows the level of interest in these communities. I call on Minister Conroy to do something and to act today. I call on the Rudd government to do something and act today. Give certainty to these people. Fix this issue today and we will move on happily and with digital television services.

Community Sports Funding

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (7.46 pm)—I take this opportunity to speak about the important role that local sports clubs play within their communities and the importance of government assistance to those clubs. Local sports clubs are critical building blocks for communities. They underpin community pride, community identity and community resilience. Regrettably, many clubs also struggle with dwindling finances, greater competition for scarce revenue, too few committee members being worn down by doing too much of the work and inadequate recognition of the important role the clubs serve. Yet without the local sports clubs we would not have elite sportspeople. We would have more health issues and we would have more social problems throughout the community.

I therefore welcome the report of the Independent Sport Panel, the Crawford report, into sport funding, which was released by Minister Kate Ellis on 17 November 2009. I believe this report provides an opportunity to reassess the process of allocation and the levels of sports funding in Australia. It is a review that I welcome. I believe that a reappraisal of federal government sport funding policy would receive widespread support throughout local community sporting organisations.

From my discussions with many local sporting clubs there is a widely-held belief that there is not an equitable distribution of government sports funding and that too much of the funding is directed at the elite level of sport. A second common concern raised is that when funds are allocated to the national body of a sporting organisation, too little of the money trickles down to the local grassroots clubs. In recent weeks I have attended several local sports clubs and listened to their concerns. I have also seen the extraordinary contribution they make to local area, and I want to refer to three of those local clubs I have visited in recent weeks.

The first club I refer to is the Golden Grove Dodgers Baseball Club. The club was the recipient of $50,000 in financial assistance from the Rudd government, which enabled the club to extend and enclose its outdoor members’ area, an improvement to the club’s facilities that would not have been possible without Rudd government assistance. The Golden Grove Baseball Club is not a large sporting club. It has limited resources, but provides a terrific opportunity for young local baseball players. Baseball is an Olympic sport and so the club offers both recreational opportunities and a pathway to both international and Olympic participation. I also congratulate the club for its outstanding performance this year. A couple of weeks ago the club sat top of the division I
ladder for the first time in its history and I understand that after last weekend’s games they are still leading the competition. I wish club president, Ray Sharp, and his players success for the remainder of the season.

The second club I refer to is the Salisbury East Junior Soccer Club. On 15 November 2009 on behalf of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and in the company of Salisbury Mayor, Gillian Aldridge, and club chairman and local ward councillor, Damien Pilkington, I officially opened the new extensions to the clubrooms. These extensions were again only possible because of the $410,000 in funding from the Rudd government. The club was established just over 40 years ago and had been operating with grossly inadequate clubroom facilities all that time. Without the Rudd government funding there appeared no possibility of clubroom extensions in the foreseeable future. The extensions substantially improve facilities for hundreds of young soccer players associated with the Salisbury East Junior Soccer Club and for the parents and volunteers who assist them.

The third club I refer to is the Salisbury East Little Athletics Club, which on 17 October celebrated its 35th birthday. The Salisbury East Little Athletics Club, which I have been associated with for many years, has been the development ground for many of South Australia’s most successful athletes, including Commonwealth champion and Olympian hammer thrower Sean Carlin. It is an outstanding club, again providing athletics opportunities and friendship for hundreds of children each year. I was joined at the 35th year celebrations by the state member for Wright, Jennifer Rankine, and by a former Salisbury Mayor Pat St Clair Dixon, who continues her 30-plus years of support for the club as club patron.

Baseball, soccer and athletics are all Olympic sports and in years to come our future Olympians will most likely have commenced their careers through these or one of the many similar local sports clubs throughout Australia. Without local clubs there would most likely be very few elite athletes. If we want to support elite athletes, we would do well to support them during their junior careers by supporting local community sports clubs, because that is where we get the best value for the sports funding we allocate, and that is when and where our potential athletes need the most assistance.

Queensland Police Service

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (7.51 pm)—Earlier today I received a statutory declaration containing serious allegations. I make no comment on the accuracy of the allegations contained therein because it is for proper authorities to comment on those. But I am of the view that open and transparent government requires public disclosure of this statutory declaration. The declaration reads:

I, Dr Christine Jane Eastwood, do solemnly and sincerely declare that

1. On Friday, 14 August 2009 at around 7 pm, I and my husband met with Mr Needham (Chair, Crime Misconduct Commission) in a hotel meeting room in Coolangatta. (I have a receipt for the booking of that meeting room).

2. In order to organise the meeting with Mr Needham, a number of phone calls were made to both his home and mobile number. A number of calls were made by him to us. (I have phone records to prove those calls took place). Mr Needham was told that I wanted to meet with him in relation to alleged serious criminal offences, potentially involving senior Queensland Police. Mr Needham was also asked not to bring or involve Helen Couper (Acting Assistant Commissioner, Misconduct, CMC).

3. When we arrived at the hotel meeting room, I saw Mr Needham and his wife arrive. He
told her to stay in the foyer, and we then went upstairs to the meeting room.

4. As soon as we sat down, Mr Needham produced a small silver tape recorder and asked us if we would agree to the meeting being recorded. We agreed. He told us that the recording was for transcript purposes. The tape was running in the small recorder for the entire duration of the meeting. (Mr Needham had a statutory duty to properly file and keep that recording).

5. I began by explaining to Mr Needham why I had asked to meet with him without Ms Couper. I told him I could not ask the QPS to investigate because potentially up to three very senior police ‘families’ could be involved in those alleged serious crimes. I also told him that all the senior police have had, or currently have fathers, brothers, nephews and/or sons serving in the QPS, up to and including Assistant Commissioner level. Therefore, I could not go to the QPS as it would almost certainly be investigated by one of the police families or their colleagues.

I told him I could not report it through the usual channels of the CMC because I knew Helen Couper (Acting Assistant Commissioner, Misconduct) had a prior work relationship and a family relationship to two of the police families (cousins). Having nowhere else to go, I believed the only place I could have the matter fairly investigated was by the Chair of the CMC himself.

Early in the meeting, when I explained to him the family relationship between the QPS families and Couper, Mr Needham indicated he was not aware of those relationships between the Qld Police and Couper. From that point his demeanour and attitude changed. His reaction was one of panic and aggression. Once I had explained the Couper connection, I could hardly get a sentence out without him interrupting me. He tried to bully and intimidate me. He was rude, aggressive and insensitive to the circumstances I was trying to explain to him. He made ridiculous statements of law and fact.

Needham intentionally, dishonestly and repeatedly misrepresented the law to me. For example, he told me that if police committed serious crimes outside of work hours there is nothing he can do about it.

When I asked if crimes of fraud, forgery and uttering (involving two or three police families and a solicitor) and manslaughter/murder could fall under the category of major crimes under the CMC Act, he appeared surprised I knew of the section and brushed me off by telling me that it usually only applied to organised crime. (However, Schedule 2 CMC Act clearly states major crime means criminal activity that involves an indictable offence punishable by a term of imprisonment not less than 14 years).

Needham discouraged me from taking the complaint to the police. I was told that if we took the evidence we had gathered to the police, they wouldn’t bother with it because they would find it ‘too hard’.

Towards the end of the meeting, when I expressed concern that he had left me with nowhere to go—he again discouraged me from going to police and reiterated that the CMC would not accept the complaint. He left the meeting room and refused to take with him any of the documentation I had prepared in relation to the complaint.

Given as Chair of the CMC, Mr Needham has the highest statutory duty to fulfil the purposes of the CMC Act, I would like answers to the following:

A. Did Mr Needham correctly file and keep the recording of the meeting, as required?
B. Did Mr Needham inform the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee (PCMC) that Couper may have an undisclosed conflict of interest going back 18 years, as required?
C. Why did Mr Needham refuse to accept my complaint as he was required to do, as required under the CMC Act?

Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the statutory declaration.

Leave granted.

**Classical Education**

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (7.56 pm)—I rise to speak of the importance of the academic discipline known as the classics and
its importance in this modern age. Having studied ancient history at high school, I developed a love of antiquity and a profound respect for what the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations achieved. Whether it is the roots of our language or the development of our democratic principles, or perhaps our approaches to thinking, the influence of the classics remains strong in the modern age. It is my view that the classics are not rightly credited with the depth of their influence upon us. Certainly the influence of the ancient civilisations is felt but not recognised by most of us.

The classics include ancient history and the study of ancient languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek. I am something of a fan of ancient history myself, studying the Peloponnesian Wars and Roman history whilst at school. Indeed, the military history of the Punic Wars continues to have modern application. One of the great ambushes of all time was the Carthaginian ambush of the Romans at Lake Trasimene. That battle has tactical application for modern military tactics and my interest in military history spurred on my interest in ancient history. The Carthaginians attacked out of the mist, pinning the unprepared Romans against the lake. It is, however, true that the Second Punic War was ultimately a demonstration of the strategic failure of the Carthaginian supply lines, and their eventual destruction—again, a modern application.

Although I have a personal interest in such history, from a national perspective, many Australians would be surprised to know that other nations have in the past recognised the strategic importance of Gallipoli before 1915. In fact, the strategic significance of the area has been known for some 3,000 years. The Turkish guns that overlooked the strait in 1915 would have, some 2,400 years earlier, seen a bridge of Persian boats that Xerxes used to take his army to Europe and attack the Greeks. Indeed, it was from the classical world that the greatest influences on our modern lives were developed. We would be little more than barbarians if the Greeks had not invented democracy. Certainly we owe the classical civilisations for Christianity, our rule of law and scientific method. The English language has relied upon these developments to give it substance.

Some call Ancient Greek and Latin dead languages. It may be true that they are not spoken by any group or nation, but those civilisations achieved great strides forward over a long period. Rome survived independently for some 1,100 years. Will people in another millennium look back on the Western European or British influenced civilisations as a golden age, or will we pale into insignificance in the shadow of the ancient civilisations?

What concerns me is that there is a lack of regard for the classics in Australia with the deep value and foundations of our own society not appreciated. I have now had some contact with the classics departments at ANU and the University of Western Australia. Sadly, these two departments consist of just four staff members each. I thank Dr Elizabeth Minchin and Dr Peter Londey for showing me around the ANU department and I congratulate Elizabeth for her promotion to professor for next year. I also congratulate her, Peter and the ANU for creating a specific new degree of Bachelor of Classical Studies, rather than being a major in the Bachelor of Arts. As part of my visit to ANU I saw their displays, including a Roman coin collection. In that coin display I observed ancient politics at work in the form of a coin from the time of Julius Caesar. As it was explained to me, on that coin it suggested that Caesar had claimed his lineage originally from Troy and claimed that his ancestors had actually founded Rome. Perhaps modern
campaigning owes its roots to the use of coins, perhaps as part of Caesar’s campaign for emperor.

In asking the Chair of UWA’s Classics and Ancient History Department, Neil O’Sullivan, for his perspectives, he informed me with great pride of the work of his team, mentioning Professor Haskell for her work on Latin in the Renaissance, Professor Kennedy for his work on aerial archaeology in Jordan, and Professor Melville Jones for his expertise in ancient coinage and Byzantine history. He also told me of recent retiree Emeritus Professor Bosworth, who during 40 years at UWA built a reputation as the world’s foremost authority on Alexander the Great.

What the visit to ANU and my contact with the department at UWA suggest to me is that Australia has a strong capability and a history of success in the classics. I know that we must never lose that, in fact we must defend it, because the study of the classical world remains fundamentally relevant. Whether it is the fact that our language is derived from Latin and Greek, the benefits in the development of powers of expression, or the profound influence which the events and ideas of the classical world have had on ours, the value of the classics becomes more relevant. As Neil O’Sullivan says, ‘The classics form a vital and shared inheritance, transcending the parochialism of particular time and place.’

I myself strongly endorse the classics as a discipline of study and it is my view that the study of such subjects should be expanded with subjects being of relevance to other disciplines such as political science, law, philosophy, medicine and others. I wish Elizabeth Minchin and Neil O’Sullivan, as well as their teams, all the best for the future in studying a very relevant past.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being well and truly 8 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 8.01 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Gillard to present a Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to health, safety, rehabilitation and compensation, and for related purposes.

Mr Byrne to present a Bill for an Act to establish the Office of the Information Commissioner, and for related purposes.

Mr Byrne to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to access to information, and for related purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Do Not Call Register Act 2006, and for other purposes.

Mr Albanese to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Midlife Engineering Services Refurbishment of the Australian Embassy in Paris, France.

Dr Kelly to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: AIMS Tropical Marine Research Facilities—Cape Ferguson and Townsville Works.

Dr Kelly to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: AIMS Tropical Marine Research Facilities—Cape Ferguson and Townsville Works.
to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Villawood Immigration Detention Facility, Sydney, NSW.

Dr Kelly to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Construction of housing for Defence on Gordon Olive Estate at McDowall, Brisbane, Queensland.

Dr Kelly to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Reconstruction of Housing on Larrakeyah Barracks, Darwin, NT.

Dr Kelly to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Redevelopment of Tarin Kowt.

Dr Kelly to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Enhanced Land Force Stage 2 Facilities Project at Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera, Queensland and other Defence Bases and Training Areas around Australia.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Tangney Electorate: Military Pensions

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (9.30 am)—I wish to speak on behalf of the veterans who live not only in Tangney but all over the country. Their main concern is the same thing: indexation of pensions. One particular constituent’s email puts the case well. It reads:

I am an ex soldier of 20 years service and receive a pension in the DFRDB scheme. I have some concerns in relation to the issues surrounding Military Pensions.

The Government’s endorsement of the four recommendations in the Matthews Report places Military super recipients at a disadvantage by keeping the indexation in line with CPI, whereas welfare and Age Pensions are indexed at a higher rate (the greater of CPI or Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLC) or Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE)).

Time is way overdue for a fair, equitable and reasonable indexation method that includes the CPI together with an outlay based living cost index and with reference to a wages based index such as MTAWE.

The PM stated that, “we have a particular responsibility towards those who have worn the nation’s uniform”. It’s time he lived up to his words.

These sentiments are echoed by many veterans in my electorate. We have seen many times that the Prime Minister’s words do not translate into actions. The full treasury and Future Fund left to them by the former coalition government have been looted faster than you can say ‘non-extraordinary solution’, without this very important issue being properly addressed.

Words of a party desperately seeking an election win have been transmogrified into the dry bureaucratese of the finance minister when he was asked about pension indexation. On 16 November 2009 he wrote to Ray Brown, the National President of the Injured Service Person’s Association, on the index issue. He acknowledged that the government’s response ‘may have caused disappointment for some recipients of Australian government civilian and military pensions’. He certainly got that right in spades.

The Matthews report did support an alternative index, but only if it reflects the price inflation experience of superannuants better than the CPI. The minister then gave a very convoluted reason why the PBLC was unsuitable. The bottom line after all that is the government has no plans to move from the CPI for indexing the pensions of Commonwealth superannuants. On behalf of all veterans in Tangney and elsewhere, can this matter please be addressed with some urgency? These veterans have served their country well, now it is time for the country to do likewise.

Blair Electorate: C17 Simulator

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (9.33 am)—On 18 November 2009 when representing the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science I commissioned the C17 heavy airlift simulator that was delivered to the RAAF base at Amberley. The C17 simulator commissioning marked the start of aircrew training in Australia from January 2010. The C17 pilots will undertake their training at Amberley instead of having to travel to the United States of America.
It is a demonstration of the cooperative relationship between the Department of Defence, the US Air Force and its contractors.

Locals are very proud to have the C17 simulator at the RAAF base at Amberley as part of the redevelopment of the base. It will provide training outcomes that will greatly enhance our ADF operations and humanitarian relief efforts provided by the RAAF C17 fleet, and we have seen that in Samoa recently.

The simulator is a replica of the C17 cockpit. It is a great game to play. I had the privilege of having a go. It was great fun. Certainly the simulator is a great addition to our ADF training and operational capacity. It will provide realistic training conditions for all C17 missions. Operational conditions can be generated across a variety of airfields in Australia and overseas.

The Boeing company built the simulator in the United States and installed it purpose-built at RAAF Base Amberley. It was constructed by the John Holland Group and transported to Amberley using two C17 aircraft. It is the centrepiece of the training system. There are 20 simulators owned and operated by the US Air Force in the United States. This is the first simulator in Australia. As I said, it marks a great achievement for the ADF. Since 2006, the C17 has become a common sight in the Ipswich area. As I indicated, it has been used to great operational effect.

The simulator enhances our capacity. It will increase the efficiency of crew training and allow the Air Force to reduce C17 rate of effort in terms of aircraft by 200 hours per year. It will result in a decrease in the frequency of short duration training flights in the Ipswich area and have a positive impact on C17 noise emissions accordingly—and that is good for the local area.

The C17 training capability also provides high-technological career opportunities for approximately 15 staff employed in the facility and, therefore, it will prove a positive benefit for the Ipswich area and its economy. I congratulate all those involved, including the US Air Force, the Royal Australian Air Force and the contractors.

National Drowning Report

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (9.36 am)—With summer rapidly approaching, I take this opportunity to raise awareness of water safety issues. I note the presence in the chamber of the member for Werriwa—an MP who I understand has undertaken his own bronze medallion course, along with six other MPs in the place. I commend the member for doing so. I have undertaken a bronze medallion course with the surf lifesaving club in my hometown of Lakes Entrance.

The drowning and injuries report—the National drowning report—released by the Royal Life Saving Society indicated that 302 people drowned in the year 2008-09. That is an increase of 41 people on the previous year. The report points very strongly to issues concerning children around water and the fact that we need to pay particular attention to children under five in the home environment as well as in the wider environment. The report recommends that parents take action that would seem like common sense. However, I am afraid that, given the number of young children who have drowned in the previous year, not enough of us are paying attention to these guidelines. The report states that active supervision and complete vigilance are required at all times with children around water and that a child’s access to water should be restricted in the home situation. It also recommends that parents take the time to
increase a child’s familiarisation with water wherever possible and that swimming lessons begin at a young age. I believe there are opportunities for our education sector to ensure that every young child, even before they go to school, has the opportunity to attend swimming lessons subsidised by state and federal governments.

In a broader sense, the issue of drowning is a major concern in a community like Gippsland. We have a vast number of opportunities for people to get themselves into trouble in the water. A lot of people visit the Gippsland region over the holiday season and are unfamiliar with the surf conditions along 90 Mile Beach. I urge people who are visiting our region to understand the need to swim between the flags on the patrolled beaches in Gippsland. There are patrolled beaches at Woodside, Seaspray, Golden Beach, Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota.

The surf lifesaving volunteers do an extraordinary job on behalf of our community. I particularly want to give reference to the younger volunteers. We often hear criticisms of young people in this place but when you see the young volunteers involved in the surf lifesaving movement it gives you great heart in the future of our nation. These people are prepared to undertake training from the age of nine. They get involved in the Nippers program and go through to the youth program and then on to become senior lifesavers. They do an extraordinary job for our community in helping to keep our beaches safe throughout the summer. They are learning leadership skills and also investing in their own personal health and fitness. It is a great program.

The other area that I would like to mention relates to young males and how they are vastly overrepresented in the drowning statistics. The figures indicate that of the 15- to 34-year-olds who have drowned in the previous year, 87 per cent of those were males. One of the common factors in the drowning deaths of young males is, unfortunately, alcohol. When it comes to swimming at beaches and in rivers and dams, we need to encourage our young men to stay out of the water when they have had a few beers.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.39 am)—It is with sadness that this morning I have to raise some issues that are really striking at the heart of my local community and certainly do not seem to be getting any better. The first and foremost issue is that National Foods is in conflict with a number of milk suppliers in Tasmania generally but particularly in my electorate. Effectively speaking, National Foods is offering these milk producers prices way below production costs at a time when, climatically, they have had a very, very serious wet spring which has impacted on their capacity to produce.

Prior to this National Foods, along with Fonterra, had encouraged milk producers to invest heavily in the future with plant and equipment on their properties. So what we have now is a company claiming that a lower price overseas is affecting domestic production and domestic prices and they are still offering a price that is well below par compared to the actual production cost. I beg and implore National Foods to do the right thing by their producers and come to a reasonable and fair arrangement as quickly as possible; otherwise, producers are going to go down the drain, the relationship between National Foods and the producers will be irreparably harmed and an important industry in Tasmania will go to the wall.

Only last Friday, without notice, McCain have announced that they will close their vegetable processing plant at Smithton, in Circular Head. This will affect up to 200 staff directly—
both part-timers and full-timers—and of course the farmers who produce vegetables for McCain. On their website, McCain say:

No matter how big we grow, we never lose touch with what’s important to the people who depend on our local operations. We pride ourselves on “drinking the local wine” and involve ourselves in our local communities in many ways.

Without notice to anybody, they made an announcement that they will close their vegetable processing plant. They claim that vegetable processing will go on until April, the packing sheds will operate until the end of the year and potato processing will go on. You cannot do business like this. I implore McCain to reconsider this decision. The federal government, with the state government and the local community, will do everything we can to have this decision rescinded. You cannot keep doing business like this in Australia. It is not fair.

**Fadden Electorate: Rotary**

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (9.42 am)—I rise to lend support and a voice to my local Rotary clubs, especially the clubs at Coomera Valley, Coomera River Midday, Hope Island, Runaway Bay, Parkwood, Southport and Nerang. Rotary clubs and Rotarians themselves do a tremendous job in their communities. A number of weeks ago a Brisbane solicitor looking to defend the notorious outlaw motorcycle gang the Finks said they are just ‘Rotary with tattoos’. The dissimilarity between the Finks and Rotary clubs could not be more stark. Rotary has more than 1.2 million members in 33,000 clubs around the world. It is the largest and most respected service organisation on the planet. With the view of ‘service before self’, Rotary seeks to make a positive and lasting difference in the world. Rotary runs an enormous number of programs—Rotary youth leadership awards, the group study exchanges, ambassadorial scholarships and tens of thousands of other projects.

But I think the thing that stands out most with respect to the value that Rotary has not only for communities but for the world is Polio Plus. It may not have gone unnoticed in the House that polio was the greatest cause of disability in the world. In 1995 there were 350,000 cases of polio in 125 countries, mostly among small children, the desperately poor, who had no hope of escaping this dreadful disease. In that year alone Rotary cast a vision for a different future for the world’s children. So far Rotary has contributed US$800 million to eradicating polio. This included individual Rotarians who joined with communities in India and in a single day vaccinated 100,000 children as part of this incredible program. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has also recently pledged another US$355 million with Rotary putting in a further US$200 million to finish the work, to get the job done. Today there are only four countries left where polio is endemic—24 years ago there were 125. A world without polio is tantalisingly close. We can almost reach out and touch it.

Rotary, in concert with other organisations, is achieving the miracle that the World Health Organisation could not be done. I therefore take great offence at a solicitor saying that the Finks are just ‘Rotary with tattoos’. Rotary seek to build up, not to tear down. They seek to heal and to provide hope, not to hurt and to harm. People would do well to go to a Rotary project, to a school or to a shopping centre, and see the extraordinary difference Rotarians make—and, heaven forbid, make a donation. Sixty cents is all it costs to put the drops in a little child’s eyes so they can have a future and hope.
Lindsay Electorate: Mamre Project

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (9.45 am)—I rise to recognise the important work being done by the Sisters of Mercy at the Mamre Project in St Marys. Based at the historic Mamre Homestead, the Mamre Project is an innovative combination of social enterprise, tourism and training that has, over the years, provided support to thousands of people in Western Sydney. Mamre Homestead was built in the early 1820s by the colonial settler the Reverend Samuel Marsden. It became a model farm, providing fruit, wheat and wool for the young colony. In 1984 Mamre Homestead was leased to the Sisters of Mercy, who established Mamre Plains Ltd, a not-for-profit organisation. Their vision for the site was to create opportunities for training and education for people in Western Sydney, embracing the notion of new beginnings that first inspired the creation of Mamre Homestead during colonial times.

Often the people participating in one of the training programs at Mamre enter the homestead in real need of support and at risk of becoming isolated from the community, but they leave as more confident individuals who have developed important work and life skills. Mamre is run on a principle of providing support for people while boosting their self-esteem by equipping them with the skills they need to enter or re-enter the workforce and overcome disadvantage. Mamre focuses on assisting young people and people with disabilities. It offers programs for students in years 8 and 9 who are at risk of not completing year 10 and a supported employment service that gives people with disabilities an opportunity to work at the on-site nursery and maintain the homestead grounds.

Mamre also operates as a registered training organisation, training more than 8,000 people in IT since 1985 and offering workplace based hospitality training through its restaurant and function centre. I recently met with some of the Sudanese families who participate in the humanitarian refugee training program at Mamre. I am proud to say that the Rudd government has provided funding for one of these programs and it provides the families with an opportunity to develop business skills and work in a market garden that provides produce to local farmers markets, so that they are working and earning money to support themselves and to contribute to the community.

I was also honoured to have been a guest at the inaugural 100-Mile Dinner at Mamre, which was part of the Sydney International Food Festival. It sourced all the food, wine and beverages from within a 100-mile radius, to encourage people to use local produce and reduce their carbon footprint. Much of it was sourced from the produce grown by the Sudanese farmers. I was joined at this event by the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, and the event was hosted by television gardener Costa Georgiadis. The event was an outstanding success.

I would like to acknowledge the driving forces behind Mamre, namely the chief executive officer, Sister Mary-Louise Petro; the general manager, Bob Thatcher; Sister Joyce Vella; Sister Janet Woods, who arranged for a group of Sudanese families to meet me in Parliament House earlier this year; and all of the volunteers and staff at the Mamre Project.

Sustainable Housing

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (9.48 am)—The issue of sustainability has gained a lot of attention in Australia as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable housing is an area that has attracted particular interest, due its environmentally friendly methods of construction...
and its excellent record in bushfire zones. Sustainable housing will provide a way to help with the environment and the issues of climate change as well as with regard to housing affordability, something which we all agree needs to be addressed especially in Indigenous communities, and homelessness, which so many people across Australia are facing on a daily basis. Australia has one of the highest levels of greenhouse gas emissions per capita, and it is important to create a large awareness of other construction methods, such as sustainable housing, which are more environmentally friendly.

A constituent of mine, Mr John Novotny, has developed a sustainable building technique using rammed-earth construction. The technique has received a lot of praise as an environmentally friendly construction method. In fact, a study conducted by RMIT described the system as the future of construction. It uses eight times less energy than other building techniques. I congratulate John, who has dedicated a lot of his life to making this an absolute passion. He is one of the true believers in climate change, and I am obviously one of those also. I congratulate John for his dedication and perseverance with this. It always seems crazy to me that both the former government and the current government spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on, in particular, Indigenous housing, when that amount could be greatly reduced by using techniques such as rammed-earth construction.

The houses John constructs have a power bill of only $89 per year, which is extraordinary, and they have a very sound fire rating. When it comes to fires, especially on those extreme and catastrophic days, the only safe place is not to be in the hills but away from the fires and the fire zones. I again congratulate John for his passion and his perseverance.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (9.51 am)—All members in this place are very generous. They are generous with their salaries, their time, their income and they always help out local charities. I know that is the case right across the board with every member of parliament. Every once in a while we get a rare opportunity—and I was privileged just recently when I was offered an opportunity to speak at a series of dinners, and I was paid for it. It was a substantial amount of money—$10,000—and I decided that I could not take the money in good faith so I decided to donate it to charities. I declare that to the parliament and I want to say where that money went.

Youngcare is a fantastic charity in my local area which supports young people who need a caring environment other than an aged-care facility. It felt important, given that we have 6,500 young Australians who are currently living in aged-care facilities simply because there are no alternatives, so I made a $2,000 donation to this wonderful organisation and lovely group of people.

Juvenile diabetes is also a very worthwhile charity, and I thought it was important to support them in the work they do. I do this anyway, but this was a unique opportunity that I had. I presented a cheque to the youth ambassador of Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Lucy Bedford, in my electorate in the lead-up to World Diabetes Day on 14 November. This young woman was diagnosed with type 1 juvenile diabetes in June last year and she took up the challenge. She is a wonderful person and I congratulate her for the work that she is doing.

Another charity which is close to my heart is cystic fibrosis. It affects so many people and it is one of those rare conditions which we still struggle to understand and to find a cure for. I
felt that it was important to support that cause as well, and I made a $4,000 donation through Matt Britton, who is cycling for cystic fibrosis, and Ray Miller, whose daughter, Nadia, suffers from cystic fibrosis and has had to deal with it through all of her 18 years. I know that the money will go to a very good cause, Cystic Fibrosis Queensland, as part of their general fund-raising efforts.

I gave to one other group, which is also a really special group in my electorate called ‘the grans’—the grandmas. They are a bunch of lovely ladies who formed a group called Giving with Love. They make up personal packages for young kids who are removed from homes where there is violence and who really have nothing—no possessions of their own. The grans do them up a little kit—a towel, a toothbrush and a few bits and pieces—so the kids feel like they have something that belongs to them. I gave them some assistance because I understand that the group fundraise or pay out of their own pensions for most of the work they do. I feel that all of these groups do such great work in our community and we should all make more effort to help support them.

Forrest Electorate: Harvey Water

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (9.54 am)—I rise to speak on the Harvey Water piping project. Harvey Water is a water supply cooperative responsible for the Harvey piping project. It is a group of farmers. Harvey Water has been operating in the Waroona, Harvey and Dardanup irrigation districts since privatisation to the farmers in 1996 and covers an area of 112,000 hectares.

In February 2004, Harvey Water approached the WA government with a proposal to pipe the Harvey irrigation district to yield 50 gigalitres of water at a cost of $250 million. The price was competitive with desalination at the time. The government agreed with the proposal and work started, involving 85 kilometres of pipe being completed on time and on budget of $24 million in 2005-06.

After the completion of the project, the reasons why it was such a success are very clear. Seventeen point one gigalitres of water are traded into the Integrated Water Supply System by agreement with WA’s Water Corporation at a very competitive cost. Harvey Water finished with a water delivery system which provides a higher level of customer service and is also cheaper and easier to run. Water saved and traded was formerly lost before it reached the farmers, so irrigators’ entitlements were not affected. The environment benefits from lower accessions to the groundwater and downstream receiving waters and a water delivery system which operates without greenhouse gas emissions both on and off the farm. Low-cost pipe was used to deliver water and save losses. The use of the trading opportunity to urban areas to fund the project was also a useful outcome. It is basically a gravity fed, low-energy irrigation system.

Harvey Water has encouraged the contribution to the sustainability of water resources in WA by identifying and accessing water of a quality which is suitable for potable purposes without the need for major risk management treatments. It saves water from being lost through the distribution system on the way to consumers, providing efficiency of delivery that improves that dramatically. It provides the opportunity for end users to make their own energy and other efficiency improvements, particularly pasture-wise.
The Harvey piping project utilised the community—many local people—in its manufacturing process. It has involved local farmers as the members of the cooperative, and I commend all those at Harvey Water for their vision. They are multi-awarded. Congratulations to Harvey Water.

**White Ribbon Day**

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.58 am)—Today, 25 November, marks White Ribbon Day, the United Nations international day for the elimination of violence against women. White Ribbon Day focuses on the positive roles that men can play to create a culture whereby violence and attitudes that support the use of violence are increasingly found unacceptable in society. The White Ribbon campaign is calling on all Australian men to sign up and swear to end violence against women as the first step in creating a culture of change on this issue.

The White Ribbon campaign is unique because it is aimed at prevention and focuses on encouraging men to take the lead role in their immediate communities and within their networks to eliminate violence against women. White Ribbon encourages all members of the community, particularly men, to speak out against violence and discourage all attitudes that allow violence in our society, particularly those directed against women and children.

It is with great concern that I note the statistic that one in three women will experience physical violence and one in five will experience sexual violence over their lifetime. To put that in a personal context—and I invite all members of the House to do that—let me speak about the women that I love and care about in my family: my mother, my wife, my daughter and my two grandchildren. Over a lifetime, one of these would be subject to this form of extreme violence. As a son, a husband, a father and a grandfather, I would find that completely reprehensible and something that would have to be stamped out because this is my family. When we pursue this issue it behoves all of us to think the same way. This is not just somebody else’s problem; this is actually our problem, and a scourge on our society.

I am happy to note that in my electorate this morning, my staff, particularly Alicia Bowie, together with representatives from the Rural Fire Service, St Vincent de Paul, the Campbelltown City Council, Macquarie Fields Police, the Fields Neighbourhood Centre, and Campbelltown Police were at Ingleburn Railway Station and Campbelltown Railway Station at six o’clock this morning selling white ribbons. I am advised that most of the merchandise was sold out within the first two hours. They are also going to various shopping centres, particularly the Glenquarie Shopping Centre, the Campbelltown Mall and Macarthur Square later on today.

We need to ensure that this is not just another day that we note on the calendar, but that it is a day in which people make a change in their attitude—a change for good. Later today I will be joining the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and many of my parliamentary colleagues in the Senate courtyard to swear the oath against violence against women. I encourage all members to become ambassadors for this great cause.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193, the time for constituency statements has concluded.
AVIATION TRANSPORT SECURITY AMENDMENT (2009 MEASURES No. 2)
BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 October, on motion by Mr Albanese:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (10.01 am)—Today we are debating the Aviation Transport Security Amendment (2009 Measures No. 2) Bill 2009—another bill amending Australia’s aviation laws. Indeed, it seems like only yesterday that I was in this place speaking to the government’s last bill on the matter, the Aviation Transport Security Amendment (2009 Measures No. 1) Bill 2009. I have no objection to speaking about aviation in this place—or, for that matter, anywhere else. It is an important part of the transport network in Australia, and it deserves due attention from both the government and the opposition. But it does seem odd to me that the government do not have their act sufficiently together to have incorporated the amendments proposed in this bill into one of their previous bills on aviation.

We seem to have a succession of quite trivial bills dealing with minor amendments to aviation matters. Surely a government that were properly on top of their policy development and knew what they were doing would have been able to incorporate all of these measures into a single aviation bill. So, in this last sitting week of 2009, and with nothing much else for the government to talk about, we are back onto aviation and a bill that contains very minor amendments on a subject that we dealt with only a few months ago, when there was another series of fairly minor amendments made to transport security measures. That is not to say that transport and aviation security is not important—it clearly is—but you would have thought that a government that understood the issues and knew what they were doing in aviation security would have been able to resolve all of these things in a single bill. I do not know whether the government are trying to get their score up for the number of bills that they have dealt with in the year, but I would have thought the content of the bill would be more important than the number.

This is a case of another uncontroversial aviation bill coming into the parliament to deal with some changes in relation to security arrangements, particularly for cargo. But this bill, like the previous one, has avoided all the really important unanswered questions facing the aviation sector. While we are dealing with comparative trivia, the government have failed to address the important matters regarding aviation policy. It has been nearly a year since the government presented their aviation green paper to, in their own words, ‘secure Australia’s aviation future’. The minister’s media release of 2 December 2008 promised:
… a detailed National Aviation Policy Statement (White Paper) in the second half of next year.

Well, we are in ‘the second half of next year’. There was later a suggestion that it was going to be September 2009—and now it is going to be December. If the government are going to bring out this white paper on the eve of Christmas, again one has to wonder why they have not been prepared to address these issues more openly, rather than hide them in the run-up to Christmas.

We are well into the second half of 2009 and there is still no white paper. Like many of those involved in the aviation industry, I look forward to what it will contain and I hope it will
resolve some of the issues facing the sector at this critical time. We have been waiting for the
white paper. There has been a policy vacuum ever since the government came to office—a
hiatus of two years when no important decisions have been made on aviation policy. Measures
underway by the previous government, particularly things such as the general aviation action
agenda, were put on hold. They had to wait until the green paper, and that took a year. When
that came out we were told to wait for the white paper and in that time nothing has happened.
The momentum for reform and change in the general aviation sector has been lost.

Nothing has been done about other key issues that people might be interested in. The gov-
ernment has been flagging its interest in what it might do about the second airport for Sydney.
Bear in mind that there has been bipartisan support for the reservation of the Badgerys Creek
site now for many, many years. Now we are told that the government is going to abandon
Badgerys Creek, that it is not going to be built; but of course it has no other alternative. Ideas
have been floated around about Goulburn and distant places. Last week we heard Richmond
come up again for about the 10,000th time. Governments of both political persuasions have
considered Richmond seriously over recent decades and have always rejected it because it is
an unsuitable site for a major airport for Sydney. There are serious environmental issues with
Richmond, issues such as fog and approaches to the airport and suggestions that hundreds of
metres might have to be taken off the top of the Blue Mountains to enable approaches to be
made to the airport. There are certainly key issues for towns like Richmond and Windsor—
historic parts of the Australian landscape—if Richmond is to be used as a major airport for
Sydney. Richmond is back on the agenda again. It is always rejected. It has been rejected pre-
viously by Labor in government. On previous occasions it has been rejected by the coalition.
But it is back again because Labor has no other ideas. The concept of building a second air-
port for Sydney at Goulburn or Newcastle seems to me to leave a lot to be desired. If you are
travelling from Melbourne to Sydney, you do not want to land in Newcastle and have a 1½-
hour or two-hour journey back to Sydney. You do not want to land in Goulburn and have a
couple of hours drive back into Sydney. It is simply not a practical option as a second airport
for Sydney.

Of course, there is actually no need for a second airport for Sydney for a lot of years, even
decades. The current airport will be able to meet demand for the foreseeable future. The gov-
ernment is raising this issue again and again. It has no answers. The green paper took a year.
Now the white paper has taken a year. There have been no answers and no policy issues to
address aviation in all that time.

There are plenty of other key aviation issues that the government might be prepared to con-
sider if it was generally interested in some of those important questions. I have already men-
tioned Sydney Airport. The government needs to reverse its decision to abolish the Enroute
Charges Scheme—an incredible decision to disadvantage those trying to provide services in
regional Australia. We have already had services closed at a result of this $5 million-a-year
decision of the federal government. When the government is out there spending billions and
billions of dollars, running up $315 billion of debt, it has to slash $5 million off a scheme to
reduce the aviation charges to small airlines running on largely uneconomic routes to small
regional communities. As I said before, a number of services have already been axed as a re-
sult. No new ones are likely to start because of this extra cost. If the government is at all serio-
ous about providing proper aviation services to regional Australia, it needs to look thoroughly at the wisdom of that decision.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—I realise that you are a whiz at aviation, but I would like you to get to the actual bill in front of us at this point in time.

Mr TRUSS—Madam Deputy Speaker, as you know, when bills deal with aviation the debate is always quite general about the issue.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The issue may be general, but the bill before us is a fairly specific one.

Mr TRUSS—I am more than happy to tie the abolition of the en route charges subsidy to the fact that cargo is carried on these aircraft, which is the subject of this bill. I am also happy to refer the remarks about Sydney’s second airport to cargo, because one of the intended purposes of that airport is for cargo flights and therefore this bill is completely relevant, I would suggest, to the subject matter I have been talking about.

There are many other questions about aviation that we could ask. What is the government doing about the passenger movement charge? Is it being spent on its intended purposes or how much of it is simply going into consolidated revenue? I think it is important that the government come clean with the aviation sector. Two years of inaction on aviation policy has clearly left the industry with a feeling of uncertainty about what its future might be.

Hanging over the people of Brisbane are the flights coming into Brisbane Airport after, say, 10 o’clock or 11 o’clock at night. Many of them are cargo flights. These flights are of particular importance to the economic wellbeing of Queensland and yet the Prime Minister is on the record as trying to prevent Brisbane Airport operating after 11 o’clock at night. Even though the nearest house to Brisbane Airport is over six kilometres from the runway—I acknowledge that that house is very close to the Prime Minister’s own house but, nonetheless, it is still over six kilometres away from Brisbane Airport—there is this threat, going back to the days when the Prime Minister was just the member for Griffith, of imposing a curfew on Brisbane Airport. That is of serious concern to the people who are about to invest about $2 billion in the new runway at Brisbane Airport and in the proposed extensions to the domestic terminal. These sorts of investments cannot happen if, in fact, there is a threat to the viability of Brisbane Airport and to the hours during which it can operate.

The government needs to address these issues and give not only the owners of Brisbane Airport but, more importantly, the people and the businesses of South-East Queensland the assurance that constraints will not be put on the operation of Brisbane Airport to suit the whims of the Prime Minister. These are important questions and they need to be answered and answered in the context of the much awaited white paper.

This bill makes some changes to air cargo policy. Can I emphasise, again, just how important the air cargo sector is to the Australian economy. Many people think of exports as coal and iron ore and exports going through our seaports. But many Australian exporters also depend on the air cargo sector to reach their overseas customers. Naturally, there are other options for sending Australian goods to overseas markets, but the aviation sector is particularly important when exports need to get to their destination quickly. In some cases, that can be fresh food products, cargo that needs to be used in industry at short notice and smaller items
which we have become used to sending around the world by air. Many Australian businesses are willing to and do pay a premium to get the goods to their destination by air.

In 2007-08 international airfreight traffic totalled over 780,000 tonnes. Both inbound and outbound airfreight traffic have shown increases in recent years. Because such a lot of that freight is actually carried underneath in the bellies of passenger aircraft, security arrangements are especially important. It is appropriate that a strict security regime be in place to guarantee the safety of not just the airfreight but the passengers who are on board those aircraft.

Outbound international airfreight—that is, Australian exports by air—totalled over 300,000 tonnes in the year ended June 2008. Nearly 70,000 tonnes of this airfreight were carried on Qantas jets, and many other airlines were involved in the carriage of airfreight—Singapore Airlines, Emirates, Cathay Pacific, and Air New Zealand each carried over 20,000 tonnes of outbound air cargo. Over 40 per cent of our outbound international air cargo was sent through Sydney airport and the most common destinations for outbound air cargo from Australia were Singapore, Hong Kong and Auckland. In many cases, Australian air cargo would have been forwarded on from these intermediate destinations to reach customers around the globe.

Air cargo is also an important part of the domestic freight industry. In terms of sheer tonnage, air cargo is a relatively small part of Australia’s domestic freight network. Currently air cargo handles about a quarter of a billion tonne kilometres and this is projected to grow at a rate of about three per cent a year. Sending cargo by air tends to be a more popular option when long distances or high value cargo is involved. Customers pay a premium for the speed of air freight, and when they need to get high value goods to distant or isolated destinations the air cargo sector provides a valuable service. It is critical that Australia’s air cargo sector remains a viable part of the freight system. It is also critical that security in the air cargo sector maintains its impressive record.

The Regulated Air Cargo Agent Scheme was created in 1996, and regulated freight forwarders and couriers who certified air freight for international carriers. The RACAs include couriers, cargo agents, express post services and other organisations involved in the transport of cargo by air. They are responsible for certifying air cargo, maintaining the security of cargo until it leaves their possession, and providing their employees with security training to improve their skills. The RACA Scheme meets Australia’s responsibilities under the Convention on International Civil Aviation.

Of course, the security environment surrounding aviation was dramatically changed by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In response to those attacks, the then coalition government completely restructured aviation security. Improvements to security in the air cargo sector were a part of this revamp. The coalition enacted the Australian Transport Security Act of 2004 to ensure security in Australian skies. The act repealed security provisions contained in the Air Navigation Act 1920 and its accompanying regulations, and the old RACA Scheme was replaced by an updated system. The Aviation Transport Security Act 2004 strengthened the regulatory framework surrounding aviation security and provided the flexibility necessary to respond to a rapidly changing air security environment.

It also took responsibility for the regulations governing the RACA Scheme and the air cargo industry. These regulations have been updated periodically under both coalition and Labor governments to reflect the changing needs of aviation security. The ATSA 2004 and its accompanying regulations required all organisations involved in transporting air cargo to ap-
ply appropriate security measures as determined by regulations under the act and to implement a transport security program approved by the Department of Transport, just like airlines and other aviation industry participants.

A TSP details how aviation industry participants will manage security within their operations and protect their operations from acts that may lead to interference with aviation security. It is a legally binding document and it is audited by the department. The requirement to maintain a TSP will continue to remain in place and has provided an enhanced level of security across the industry. Currently there are over 950 RACAs in over 1,700 sites across Australia dealing with international and domestic air cargo. Well over 2,000 employees with security functions have been trained under the RACA security training framework.

Since the introduction of the RACA Scheme, the air cargo sector has operated without a major security breach. In a challenging environment, with billions of dollars of cargo being transported every year, this is testament to the effectiveness of the security regime. But it should not lead to complacency. It is important that security regulations in Australian aviation appropriately reflect the level of risk at any given time. It is also important that security regulations do not unduly hamper the efficient operation of the air cargo sector, especially given its importance to the Australian economy and its dependence on speed to attract its business.

The bill currently before the House amends the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004. It continues the reforming work that occurred under those on this side of the House, and the opposition is happy to support it. The bill will expand the definition of ‘cargo’ to mean an article that is ‘reasonably likely’ to be transported by aircraft. Often, the decision to transport a piece of cargo by air is not made as soon as it is lodged with a cargo agent; sometimes that decision is made much further along the supply chain. As a result, cargo may not be inspected and certified early on in the supply chain. It may have to be inspected and certified just before being loaded onto an aircraft, which may mean having to extract it from a larger shipment. This can be inefficient and impose unnecessary delays and costs on the industry. If such an article could be inspected and certified earlier in the supply chain before the decision to transport it by air was made, it would make for a more efficient supply chain and would allow action to be taken at a more appropriate and convenient time.

The definition of ‘reasonably likely’ will be established by regulations under the act. It is our understanding that it would encompass goods that are identified by the sender as priority freight or goods that are accompanied by a dangerous goods statement. The bill will also expand the definition of ‘industry participants’ who are authorised to certify cargo to include both regulated air cargo agents and accredited air cargo agents.

The AACA Scheme extends the RACA Scheme to cover smaller operators with less complex operations. It is not yet in place, and no AACAs have yet been recognised, but the scheme will come into effect and the government will approve AACAs in 2010. I understand that the government has received many registrations of interest from operators interested in being accredited under the scheme.

Participation in the AACA program will bring smaller operators into the air cargo security regime and will allow these operators to transport cargo from one RACA to another without compromising the security environment. This bill will ensure that a regulatory framework exists in time for the AACA Scheme to come into effect. Participation in either the RACA...
Scheme or the AACA Scheme will be compulsory for all operators involved in the transport of air cargo.

Other countries, including many of Australia’s major trading partners, are currently introducing similar schemes. Such a scheme will be beneficial in itself but, if it ensures that the Australian air cargo sector is moving in the same direction as our overseas trading partners, it will have additional benefits. A supply chain that allows a package to be inspected and certified upon receipt by one firm, transported to an airport by a second, handled and loaded onto an airplane by a third, and shipped overseas by a fourth, all without leaving a secure and regulated environment will, hopefully, enhance efficiency without compromising the good reputation of Australia’s air cargo sector overseas.

The bill will allow regulations to be made that will stipulate the circumstances under which cargo can be certified by a RACA or an AACA. Like anything that is done through regulations, attention will need to be given to the details. At the moment, cargo tends to be examined just before it is loaded onto an aircraft. This means that there is a very short period between certification and loading where any potential tampering could occur. Under the amendments proposed by this bill, inspection and certification will be allowed to take place further back in the supply chain, before cargo arrives to be loaded onto an aircraft.

There are good reasons to allow such certification earlier, and I referred to them a few moments ago. If security checking is all done at the last minute, a great deal of pressure is put on the individuals doing the inspections and the prospect that something may be missed could exist. Allowing inspection and certification earlier, when cargo is in a less consolidated and more accessible state, is likely to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the air cargo security regime. But if certification is done at a point that is far removed both in time and distance from loading it is understandable that aircraft operators would have concerns about the potential risk of tampering during the waiting or pre-transport period. This is an issue that has been raised by a number of the airlines, and it will be very important in dealing with the regulations that these risks are in fact addressed. It will mean that the regulations governing the RACA and the AACA schemes will need to ensure that once cargo is examined and certified it is kept secure and in tamper-free circumstances.

The United States has recently finished piloting the Certified Cargo Screening Program. Carriers and cargo agents are audited by the appropriate transport authorities under this scheme and are expected to comply with security regulations in the conduct of their business, much like the schemes proposed in this bill. Under the American scheme, inspection and certification can be only one point removed from acceptance by the air carrier. The scheme proposed by this bill will allow certification further back in the supply chain, but the regulations stipulating the circumstances under which this certification can occur have of course not yet been seen. The regulations governing air cargo security under the RACA and the AACA schemes will need to be sufficiently tight to preclude unacceptable risk to air carriers. The opposition, along with air cargo industry players, will certainly watch the regulations closely to ensure that they do not allow a security gap between the certification of cargo and the loading of that cargo onto an aircraft. The bill will also make minor changes enabling the secretary of the department to issue notices specifying the circumstances under which cargo may be certified by approved agents, change the definition of cargo in existing TSPs to the definition contained within the bill and maintain the validity of existing regulations made under the
These amendments are reasonable and acceptable to the coalition. Overall, the bill will provide a more flexible and appropriate security regime that will enhance air cargo security without imposing undue or excessive restrictions on industry participants.

The air cargo sector plays an important role in Australia’s transport network. In recent years security in this sector has been challenged by developments, and it has to meet these challenges. Given Australia’s record in air cargo security, we may conclude that the security regime established by previous governments has been effective. As the security environment changes, Australia needs to respond. It should be the goal of both governments and the air cargo sector to ensure that the Australian freight network remains secure without imposing excessive regulation and costs on industry and the ordinary Australians who depend upon it to operate efficiently and effectively. The legislation therefore builds on the strong foundations left by the previous government. It will enable us to maintain an air cargo security apparatus that enhances Australia’s reputation for robust security amongst our major trading partners and that is as effective and efficient as possible.

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (10.28 am)—I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his comments. Certainly the bulk of those comments only go to prove just how important this bill is, not the matter of trivia that he referred to in his opening comments. I also thank the Leader of the Nationals for the gratuitous lecture about how the government is organising aviation policy. I would have thought that to be lectured about the management of business in this of all weeks was truly remarkable, but I always stand to be surprised. The Australian government will release the aviation paper soon. The Leader of the Nationals knows this. It will be a comprehensive document. The government has received something like 500 submissions from industry and the community in the development of what will be Australia’s first ever national aviation policy, and I look forward to the comments of the Leader of the Nationals on that paper.

But, as to this bill, the government has a specific role in relation to transport and supply-chain security. The Office of Transport Security in the department regulates the transport security industry to minimise the risk of unlawful interference that could result in catastrophic consequences for an aircraft from an improvised explosive device in cargo. As has been said, the security of air cargo is absolutely critical to ensure Australia’s compliance with the Convention on International Civil Aviation and also to ensure that we meet the security requirements of key trading partners such as the United States and the European Union.

Approximately 80 per cent of international air cargo is carried on passenger aircraft, and total air cargo exports for Australia in 2008 were valued at $31 billion. Air cargo is mostly lightweight, high-value and requiring urgent delivery. To meet customer demands, the air cargo industry’s ability to quickly and securely transport goods and services domestically and internationally is crucial in today’s competitive economy.

The air cargo industry is a diverse and multimodal environment. The handling and processing of air cargo involves a complex web of physical movements by a large number of individuals and organisations. Most air cargo is handled by multiple operators and passes through several consolidation points before it is loaded onto an aircraft. Factors such as the volume and the time-critical nature of such cargo, the number and mixed responsibilities of air cargo handlers, as has been stated, and the physical constraints on processing cargo all impact on the
flow of goods at various stages through the supply chain. The government believes that better security checking earlier in the supply chain, when the goods are in a less consolidated state and more easily unpacked and scrutinised, is the most effective and efficient way to manage security. So I am pleased that there is bipartisan support for what is obviously a sensible approach.

The bill contains six key amendments to the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004, to expand the regulatory scope for supply chain security by the Office of Transport Security, Australia’s aviation security regulator. Firstly, the bill will expand the definition of ‘cargo’ to include circumstances where cargo is reasonably likely to be transported by aircraft. Currently, cargo is defined more narrowly, limiting the point at which those security measures are applied. The bill and subsequent regulations will ensure all cargo likely to be transported by aircraft is dealt with by parties who are regulated and obliged to apply security measures at each stage.

The second amendment will expand the scope of industry participants who may certify cargo, through a revised definition of the term ‘certified’. Currently, cargo can only be certified by aircraft operators. So the revised definition will allow certification of cargo by regulated air cargo agents, accredited air cargo agents and aircraft operators. This amendment will allow an expanded range of industry participants to clear cargo. Thirdly, the bill will allow for regulations that will prescribe the circumstances in which cargo may be certified. The fourth amendment in the bill will give the secretary of the department the power to issue a written notice specifying the circumstances in which cargo may be certified. That will allow for the system to be more flexible and responsive to technological advancements and to international obligations. The fifth amendment will introduce a transitional provision for transport security programs to ensure consistency with the provisions of this bill. And the final amendment will preserve the existing regulations until such time as new regulations take effect.

So, overall, this bill and its regulations will ensure that when a parcel gets to the airport there will be a clear paper trail assuring the person who loads the cargo that it has been security cleared. So the amendments will provide the foundations for a whole-of-supply-chain security system which is sufficiently flexible that it can be adapted in line with new technology and changes in the level of threat.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

COMMITTEES
Education and Training Committee
Report

Debate resumed from 16 November, on motion by Ms Bird:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (10.34 am)—As a member of the Standing Committee on Education and Training, I rise to speak on the tabling motion of the report put forward by the committee entitled Adolescent overload? I see the member for Cunningham, the chair of the committee, here. It was a pleasure working with her on this particular report. It is an important report that
goes to all of our desires to see that our children and students in Australian schools get the best possible education they can.

It is probably relevant that this report—Adolescent overload?—is tabled this week. My son is on his schoolies week down in the south-west of Western Australia at the moment. If he is listening: please do not overload, Jarrad; take note of this report. It is an important report that investigates how students are coping with combining school and work. For a lot of them, obviously, the school year is over, but it was interesting to discover that Australia is one of only a few countries with a high proportion of students who take outside work. The others in the OECD include the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Denmark. I know that this affects many young people within my electorate of Swan; I have over 65 schools in my electorate, which makes it fairly school oriented, and a lot of people will be taking interest in this report.

The inquiry was conducted with a healthy degree of consultation. There were 13 public hearings across the country: seven in Canberra and one each in Adelaide, Perth, Burnie, Melbourne, Brisbane and Port Kembla. Importantly, the public hearings took evidence from the students themselves. I am pleased to say that 2,765 students completed the online survey of which 1,722 were engaged in some form of work outside school. So this report is based on plenty of evidence from a decent investigation, and I thank the committee secretariat in particular for facilitating it.

Statistics provided to the department of education show that in 2007 the proportion of students aged between 15 and 19 who were working was 37 per cent. That breaks down into 31 per cent of males and 42 per cent of females. The survey revealed that almost half of young people were employed in retail with another third in the fast food or hospitality sectors. The report identified a number of overlapping reasons for this. One is the desire to earn money. During the committee’s student forums, a primary reason given for working was to save money, and the biggest priority was buying a car. I am sure many of the students also used it to pay their mobile bills as well. Another reason was the quest for financial independence, or increased personal autonomy. A girl from Perth noted that it was good to not have to ask her parents for money all the time; it was her money and she could do what she wanted with it. Other students maintained that their early experience in the workplace would help their job prospects after study. For a small proportion of students, working was cited as a means to providing greater financial security for the family. It is a pity that in a country like this students feel they have to work to help support their family.

The report also considered the positive and negative aspects of part-time work. Positive aspects for students included enhancing confidence and self-esteem, contributing to financial wellbeing, facilitating the development of social networks, gaining useful knowledge and independence in exercising greater responsibility and self-reliance, instilling a work effort and attitude, and developing work and organisational skills, including time management skills.

The report noted that many young people managed to successfully fit in work with study. A study by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research in 2001 suggested that 63.2 per cent of students found balancing the two not too hard, but at the same time it was interesting to see that a lot of the students who were in the middle socioeconomic class went from working really hard in year 11 to finishing work at the end of year 11 in order to concentrate on their studies in year 12. However, there comes a point when too many hours make life too
difficult. An LSA research report in 2003 showed that males who work five to 15 hours per week during year 12 are 40 per cent less likely to complete year 12 than those who do not.

Part of the report concentrates on the confusion students have as to how many hours they should be working. Some students said that they received conflicting advice from their parents, who encouraged them to go out and get a job, and their teachers, who encouraged them to concentrate more on their studies. It was interesting to note that some of the students did not want their teachers to know that they were working; they felt it was their own lives and they kept it apart from their school. Particular responsibility lies with parents and schools to provide good advice in this instance. The survey responses showed that a large majority of students with part-time jobs believe that working impacts on the amount of time they have available for study.

The report contains a number of recommendations, most of which call for some further research or action from the Australian government. Recommendation 2 is:

That the Australian Government develop and implement a national generic skills passport for secondary students to document the employability skills they develop through activities undertaken outside school. These activities should encompass paid and unpaid work (including community/volunteer activities and work for the family business), sporting and recreational activities and other life experiences.

It is important that the skills that students pick up are properly recognised. As an ex-employer, I know that it is not always easy to judge someone’s readiness to work or their employability. If this recognition of previous experience were graded, it would give the employer more tools to make a better employee choice.

One of the highlights of the inquiry for me was the visit to Adelaide, to the Para Hills High School, to talk to the students and some of the parents there. I also talked to Chandal and Nikita, former students who went back to the school that day, and to people from a variety of other schools represented there—Smithfield Plains High School, Craigmore High School, Salisbury High School and one student from Paralowie R-12 School. There were some TAFE directors there as well, so it was a well-organised forum.

Another highlight for me was at Leeming Senior High School in my state of Western Australia, where I caught up with Mr Steve Wright, who I see around my electorate a bit. It was good to catch up with him. It was also interesting to see the representative from Hungry Jack’s there, the traineeship manager. It gave her an opportunity to hear from young people who work in Hungry Jack’s. The buffer between the workers and the traineeship manager was obvious, because the traineeship manager was not aware of some of the information that came out from the students because it had not been getting back to her through the manager. It was good to have those people there, particularly the Commissioner for Children and Young People; her senior policy officer; Louise Atherton; and people from the Department of Education.

Another highlight for me was the student forum in Canberra, which I thought was really good. We got some great feedback from students, particularly looking at some of the problems with not their knowing their rights in the workplace. My son, who has recently started some employment, had not even considered thinking about what his rights were or how much he should be paid, but I gave him some ideas on that. It is an important issue for students to be aware of.

As we all know, the education of our students is imperative, and we need to make sure that this report has an influence on that. As I go around towards the end of the year doing school
visits, as I know a lot of the members here do, I always try and tell the students—and I give the same advice to my son—not to be afraid to seek the truth. There are a lot of people who will give you impressions on both sides of arguments, and young people should make sure that they always seek the truth. I see the member for Gippsland is here. I know of his particular interest in youth education and youth allowance. I am sure he will talk about that during his speech.

In conclusion, this report has provided some useful information from students on their interaction with the working world. It will be a useful tool for students and parents across the country and should be considered by the government. I commend the report.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (10.43 am)—by leave—I thank the chamber for granting me leave to make additional comments on this report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, Adolescent overload? Report of the inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions. I had a short opportunity to address the report when it was presented in parliament last week but, given that that was only five minutes, I want to take the opportunity in this chamber to add some more to those comments. I thank the member for Swan for his contribution to the debate and his enthusiastic and reliable participation in the committee. Often these committees survive on a couple of members who take the role seriously and engage, and he most certainly did that, as did other members who have addressed this report. I appreciated that.

I took the opportunity in the five minutes I had in the main chamber to thank the committee members and to thank the secretariat—and I acknowledge Dr Glenn Worthington is with us today in another capacity—whose work was fantastically important. That was particularly so in this case because, when we took on the reference from the minister to look at this transition from when young people are able to take on paid employment, generally from around the age of 15, to when they progress out of school into work or further study, and to look at the impact on that transition—particularly given that we have got a huge focus on increasing retention rates in schools—we knew we had a large roundtable at the beginning of the year with, I think, over 50 peak organisations from the education sector, the community sector, the trade union sector, all the academics, to talk about this issue, but we felt very strongly that we wanted to hear from young people. If members have a close look at the report, they will see it is full of the voices of young people, and I think that was a particularly important aspect of the report.

We sought to do that by, firstly, the usual process of public hearings. We had 13 public hearings around the country and, as the member for Swan indicated, we had large forums at a number of secondary schools to which we invited all the neighbouring schools. We tried to cover all the states. We did Para Hills High School in South Australia, Leeming Senior High School in Western Australia, the Tasmanian Academy Hellyer campus in Tasmania, the Holmesglen Vocational College in Victoria, Craigslea State High School in Queensland and Illawarra Senior College in New South Wales. So we heard from a lot of students, their parents and their teachers at those forums.

But, in addition, I think the most important and significant innovation was that we established an online student survey. We wrote to all high schools inviting them to let young people
know that the survey was available and that we were interested in hearing about their experiences and views. The response was that 2,765 young people actually took the opportunity to complete the survey and provide us with their views. That was particularly important, I believe, because when we came to the point of making recommendations in the report we did not want to take a paternalistic, adult view of what was best for these young people. We wanted to make sure that the actions of government supported and reflected the views of those young people, and I think that is what we have achieved.

It is important to note—and other speakers, including the member for Swan, have identified—that young people are much more involved in part-time work than when many of us were that age. I will not cast aspersions on the room by trying to calculate how long ago that may have been! Certainly, I know from my own personal experience that at the age of 15, like many, I was desperate to get out and get a casual job and have some money that I could decide how to spend. But in those days there was only ever probably one late-night shopping night in most states and on Saturdays shops stayed open till about two o’clock at the latest. So, on average, students who had a casual job could not work more than eight to 10 hours, because they were the only hours outside normal operational hours that were available to students.

Government members interjecting—

Ms BIRD—The other members may have had more horse-and-cart driven experiences, I understand! However, I was a mere check-out chick at Coles at the time. The reality for young people at the time that I first experienced work was that it was a fairly manageable and a tremendously positive experience.

Now, of course, as we know, the nature of work is very deregulated. Working in the retail industry is a full weekend, and we heard from students who worked two eight-hour shifts, on Saturday and Sunday, on a weekend. Then there is the fast food industry. I remember the first KFC when I was a kid and what an extraordinary thing it was. It certainly was not open every night of the week. But now in the fast food industry there are multiple sites in every town which are open seven nights a week, often until midnight, and they are staffed by, by and large, school-age students.

What we are seeing is a significant increase in the number of young people engaged in part-time work while they are in school, but most importantly, and what we heard a great deal of from young people, was that the nature of that work is also different. We should acknowledge that it was the view of nearly everybody who submitted that public policy has in some ways been blind to this development in our society; that young people working is a very common Australian experience for whatever reason, perhaps because we do not have cheap entry level labour from neighbouring countries that comes here to work in the ways that perhaps America and parts of Europe experience. We have had a long tradition of relying on our young people under the age of 18-19 to fill those gaps in the workforce. I think both the economy and young people and their families have gained great benefits from that.

However, the expansion of, not only the number of hours, but also the hours at which young people are working is an issue that I think public policy now needs to pay attention to. Given that these young people are not legally adults—they are in transition to adulthood—we have a responsibility above and beyond what we have to normal employees and students, to make sure that they are treated well. That is what this report attempts to go to in addressing it.
Many speakers have talked about the variety of reasons that students gave us about why they work. It is important we understand why young people decide to work. Many of the media interviews I have done since we tabled the report contain a bit of a snide comment that young people are just a materialist generation—they all just want mobile phones and designer brand clothing. Well, to be honest with you, what has changed? Certainly, when I was young, I was not working primarily for the love of it, I was working for some independent money and I think that is a good thing. Young people decide that they want those additional things in their life. Many of them said, ‘I do not want to be constantly badgering mum and dad for the money for those additional items such as mobile phones or new clothing’ or, indeed, for their social life, to be constantly asking for money to go to the movies or whatever. They like the fact that they can support themselves in that way. I think that is commendable and we should recognise it and not in any way down grade that aspiration.

We heard, clearly, parents saying to them to go out and get a job. The vast majority of parents reflect the fact that they like young people to be earning a bit of income, to be learning some responsibility and to be starting the transition to adulthood in the workplace. A lot of young people however did say that they thought their school was perhaps not quite as supportive, that the school tended to have a view that if work was a problem, give it up—the priority should be school. Many of the young people agreed that their education was the priority, however, work was very important to them.

We should also recognise that many young people said, ‘Yes, I am working for money, obviously; I am not out there doing it for the love of it’ but they were very able to identify lots of other benefits that they got from that experience of work. Many of them talked about the social networks, the employment networks, the importance of their CV when they go out to look for work after school, having had that work experience. We should acknowledge that opinion was expressed by young people who aspired to work after school and those who aspired to go on to further study. Many of them knew that when they left school and looked for a part-time job at 18 they were less attractive to employers compared to the 15-year-olds out there in the market. But if they were an existing employee—if they had already worked for that organisation for a couple of years while they were at school—they were more likely to be kept on. They were very canny, I have to say, in their assessment of the work market and the opportunities and the benefits they were getting from their casual jobs. As an example, there was a student at the forum in the Illawarra Senior College at Port Kembla and he said that he liked the workplace because it was like a second family.

Many students reflected that they really liked the fact that they were meeting adults and young people from outside their immediate school and family circle and that they were learning to interact with the broader population in a way that gave them skills. In fact many of them said that the part-time job was actually an escape, that they liked feeling competent and in charge in the job and able to do the tasks that were set them—perhaps compared to struggling through the academic studies of the senior years and trying to keep on top of all of that. They had a real sense of pride in what they were doing. It is important to understand that they really value their jobs, and that is reflected in the fact that many of them make other sacrifices in their lives to keep them. They may give up sport or even time with friends because they want to keep their job and they value the experience they get from it.
The important thing to take from the feedback from young people is that they had the view that it was a positive experience. They did not want government to take actions that would downgrade the value of what they were doing. We heard very strongly from them that they did not want us to regulate. Many students said to us, ‘If you limit the number of hours I can work I may well give up school to do the job, not the other way around.’ We tried to respect those views. The one area I suppose we did struggle with a little was the late hours. We heard of students working at fast food outlets where the shift was supposed to finish at 10 pm who had a rush of customers at the last minute, the outlet did not actually shut until 11 pm and then they had to clean up. Being a parent who has sat in a car outside one of those places I can well understand the frustration that causes. They get home at midnight and then try to do homework, get up early in the morning to do it or take a day off school the next day to try and catch up. So there are implications around that.

The committee took the view that the best way to progress this is to do what we can to get the community to engage in a conversation about this aspect of our young people’s life experiences and about our responsibilities as the parents, teachers and employers in their lives to make sure that there is a positive outcome. We put recommendations in place that are more educative than regulatory, in an attempt to get a broader consensus of responsibility in the community and to support these young people.

It is important to note—and the member for Swan highlighted this—that the number of young people we talked to who had no idea about their rights and protections in the workplace was quite shocking. We were particularly concerned that many of them reflected that they could not simply say no. They used terms like ‘guilt trip’ quite consistently. They would say that they had indicated to their employer that they were available to do one eight-hour shift each week, but someone else would not be available so they would get a phone call. Many of them take their mobiles to school and leave them on so that their employers can ring them to come in at the last minute. That is how they end up doing excessive hours, beyond what they should be doing. Regularly, over and over again, out of an overdeveloped sense of responsibility they said, ‘Oh, no—I can’t say no to the boss. They really rely on me’, and their capacity to say, ‘I appreciate your dilemma, but tonight I’ve got an assignment due. I cannot do an additional shift,’ was, sadly, not very commonly shown. We saw a lot of young people who because of their sense of responsibility could not say no—or, sadly, many of them reflected that if they say no they do not get any more shifts. That was a less common problem but it was still there.

We have endorsed things under Fair Work Australia such as the youth liaison officer and the toolkit that is being developed to provide young people with information. I would like to recommend to members of the chamber that they take the opportunity to look at this report and particularly to look at the words of the young people who have put in a lot of time on this. They deserve respect for the effort they also have put into the report.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (10.59 am)—It is with great pleasure that I join the debate in relation to this report of the Standing Committee on Education and Training on adolescent overload. I have had the opportunity to read through the report over the past 48 hours and I commend it. Although I am not a member of the committee I am particularly interested in education issues as they affect regional areas. I commend the member for Swan, who has already spoken on the report, and the member for Cunningham for her very thoughtful and
common-sense presentation of the issues. I understand the member for Braddon will make a contribution as well.

The foreword by the member for Cunningham is quite illustrative. Any members who are interested in the issue should have a look at the foreword and the recommendations in particular. I just want to quote from the foreword, where the member for Cunningham refers to the fact that:

There are considerable positive benefits for students who combine school and work. Those who find the right balance are not only rewarded with a range of social and economic benefits, but their chances of a successful transition into further education, training or work are significantly enhanced.

That particular paragraph really picks up the theme of the member’s contribution here today that overwhelmingly there are many positive aspects for students who have part-time and casual work but it is tough to find that balance. It is almost impossible, I believe, for any government at state or federal level to make hard and fast rules in that regard, such as rules or regulations which would require students to work a maximum number of hours per week. It simply will not work. The students themselves would not cop that type of system. They do need that flexibility and some students, as I said, will cope better than others.

But there is one area that I am not sure the report covered in any detail. It relates to the issue of seasonal work undertaken by students. In my community, which has a very significant tourism industry, I believe we have an emerging problem with students between years, in that six- or eight-week break that they might get in their senior levels of schooling, where they pour a lot of hours into casual work in our community. It goes beyond casual work. Some of these students are doing 40- and 60-hour weeks at a time when having a break may be in their best interests.

Finding that balance is a really tough issue that I think the report addresses. I think it is a very significant social and economic issue and public policy has not necessarily kept up with the changes, as the member for Cunningham correctly identified. We have in Gippsland in particular, and in a lot of regional communities, a real challenge to keep our students at school. Finding a way to balance that opportunity for them to get some part-time work and get some independence but then maintain their studies is a critical issue for us in regional areas.

The Gippsland region has one of the worst education retention rates in Victoria. Compared to a state and metropolitan rate in excess of 80 per cent in 2006, just 65 per cent of Gippsland students finished year 12. These figures naturally translate into a lower participation rate for Gippsland students in university and higher education. I have spoken in the House on that topic many times in the past and I am sure I will again in the future, particularly as we refer to issues surrounding student income support as we go forward.

The report acknowledges the changing nature of the casual and part-time employment workforce in Australia. As the member for Cunningham referred to, some of us are a little bit older. I can refer to my very distant youth riding to work in Sale. I was actually a Woolworths checkout boy and a bag packer at the end of the line there, and the big promotion I got was to go to the fruit and veggie section for the second half of my term as a casual employee. The member was right that employment in those days for students was based around Thursday nights, Friday nights and Saturday mornings, and that was the full extent of it. They were the only hours that were available anyway and I thought that was probably a reasonable balance. It was about 12 hours a week. As a student attending years 10, 11 and 12 you could maintain
that workload and there were enormous benefits, I believe, for students in having that type of part-time work.

Now, with the longer operating hours that members have referred to, the longer shifts and the huge increase in the prevalence of fast food outlets, there are far more hours available to students. There is increasing demand, particularly in regional areas, where we have an older population, for some of these businesses to seek a younger market—and, let us be honest, the students are paid a lower rate than more mature workers and there are some economic benefits for the businesses themselves. I think they need to handle that issue with a great deal of responsibility going forward and I will refer to that a little bit later on. There is one other area. Of course, in rural and regional areas it is sometimes difficult for students to access part-time work as well, which I am sure some of the students have raised in their contributions to the inquiry.

Having said that, there are over 260,000 young Australians who are combining school and work at any given time. It is my personal view that part-time employment is incredibly important for young people. In fact, I have four young children. When they get to that age I will be encouraging them to get out there and get a part-time job because I think it develops some very healthy habits for young people. They develop a work ethic and learn new skills. I think one of the great things that a part-time job does is that it helps young people to develop their self-esteem and build pride in themselves and what they are able to achieve independently of their parents.

We have a whole generation of parents who, I hasten to say, have become the ‘helicopter’ generation, where we are hovering around our kids all the time and trying to protect them from every great unseen threat. I think the helicopter parents could fly off every now and then and let the kids get on with their part-time work, where they can develop a lot of great skills. I think they surprise us sometimes with what they are capable of doing. There is a lot for us as parents to learn from watching our young people when they get into the situation where they have some independence. They are quite extraordinary in terms of what they can contribute in that work environment.

But, again, I hasten to add that it is important that we find a balance for the students. Part-time work does give them independence and the opportunity to make a financial contribution, to ease the pressure on their families. The member for Swan referred to that as an area of some concern. I agree that there is some concern there if it is seen as a financial necessity and families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds need the students to work to contribute to the household income. But, where it is a student who is actually just making a contribution, the students feel a great deal of pride in the fact that they are able to make that contribution and they do not have to go to mum and dad and ask for $10 or $20; they can reach into their own savings. It teaches them a great many skills that will hold them in good stead later in life. Financial literacy is an issue of significant concern in our community. People are finding that they are getting into trouble with credit cards and that type of thing. If our students have the opportunity to earn money at a younger age and learn to budget, save and use their money responsibly on the things that they choose to use it on, the financial literacy that develops is another important aspect of having a part-time job.

Another area that members have spoken about is the opportunity for this generation of students to get into an environment where they are part of a team, where they are working to-
gethers, and they get to socialise with other workmates—often from other schools, not necessarily their immediate peer group. It gives them the opportunity to communicate and work as a team, rather than sending text messages all the time—which I think is an occupational hazard for many of our young people.

As I referred to earlier, I do understand there is a real need to make sure there is balance in this issue. The Adolescent overload? report clearly identifies the contribution from some of the parents and the students. In chapter 2 there is a quote from one of the submissions:

Anecdotally, parents tell us that it is of major concern to them that their children are working late at night some nights and long hours within those late nights... it is often stated that the young people in question must choose between these long hours and late nights or give up their jobs—there is reported to be little room for compromise.

We need to understand the competing interests here. The students are primarily at school for an education—they are not to be seen as a product of the economy where they are just a working unit of cheap labour, if you like. The balance does need to be found and a lot of understanding needs to be shown by our teachers as well as the parents and the small business sector. The importance of getting the balance right is a message that is continually highlighted through the report.

Members have also spoken about the protection for young workers who are most vulnerable at that time in their lives to exploitation. It is very difficult for a 15- or 16-year-old girl to stand up to the boss and say, 'No, that's not a safe procedure,' or 'That's not the way I understand the work should be done'. I take up the member for Cunningham's comments, that we do have a heightened level of responsibility to care for young people in the workplace and to make sure that their first experience is a positive one. We have both reflected on our time in supermarkets. I found it overwhelmingly positive to have the opportunity to work with a bunch of young people. There were some more senior managers keeping us all in line, but we had a lot of fun in that work environment and the money was very beneficial to me and my family at the time. Mum and dad had pretty basic incomes and there were five kids, so it really helped take the burden off them. I think it was a very important stepping stone in my career in developing some responsibility.

Taking steps within this part-time and casual work environment to make sure that students are acquiring skills that will help them later in life is a very important aim, and the report does touch on that. It certainly adds to the student's employability and sets them on the pathway to success. I have had the opportunity in the past to hire people and I often looked at what they did when they were 15- and 16-years old—did they have a part-time job? It gave you a sense that they had a capacity to be self-motivated and could take responsibility. When you are interviewing people for work, even later in life, you do tend to check on what they did as 16-, 17- or 18-year-olds to make sure that they have the capacity to balance their lives and they actually know that there is a time for work, a time for study and a time for play. We have not really looked at this much in terms of public policy development, and I think this report is a good stepping stone. I encourage other members to have a look through it and refer to the recommendations.

I want to go specifically to a few of the recommendations. The first is recommendation 2, which looks at developing and implementing a national generic skills passport. These activities should encompass paid and unpaid work, including community and volunteer activities.
and work for a family business, along with sporting and recreational activities and other life experiences. I think employability skills and opportunities for some form of accreditation is one area that has a great deal of merit. I imagine it would be fairly difficult to come up with a national scheme in that regard, but it is giving young people recognition for the skills they are learning. A lot of opportunities in the workplace would involve doing a first aid course, for example. I know that a lot of young people in my electorate are involved in things like the surf lifesaving movement. They are developing skills as they go through, and adding to their future employability is a really positive initiative and I support that recommendation.

I referred earlier to recommendation 3, which says:

That the Australian Government, in consultation with stakeholders, develop a Code of Practice for employers, supervisors, and workplace mentors to outline their responsibilities in assisting students to document their acquired employability skills.

That touches on some of the issues of making sure that we really do have a heightened sense of responsibility when we have young people in our care in a workplace. Recommendation 12 refers to support for students at risk and recommends:

That the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, encourage evaluation and reporting on outcomes from local programs targeting disadvantaged students with a view to highlighting positive aspects of programs which could potentially be replicated.

This is a very important recommendation in the report. I do not see that all these responsibilities should fall on the government. I refer to my own community, where local community action encouraging and providing opportunities for young people has been very successful. Just last week in Traralgon the St Paul’s school parents group organised a local shopping trip. Instead of mothers paying $40 or $50 to go on a bus to Melbourne to go to the warehouses to buy their Christmas presents, they organised a local shopping trip. There were 150 mothers split into 12 groups of 12, with a few extras on the end. They went around to local shops that were part of the promotion and were giving them a discount to shop locally. This is a message that I promote regularly in my community. I call it, ‘Putting locals first.’ Admittedly, it is parochial in the sense that I am encouraging local communities to support their own economy rather than always travelling off to the major metropolitan centres. How it works in this sense is that we have a school group, which I think spent about $45,000 on the night—it is the first time in my life that I have ever said to a woman, ‘Go out and spend your money.’ It is very easy to encourage the wives of other people to get their credit cards out, Mr Deputy Speaker. They went out and supported the local shops, and that necessarily leads to local jobs.

One of our great challenges in our regional communities is providing opportunities for young people. We have referred to the increased number of hours available through some of the chain stores and fast food outlets, but supporting small businesses is very important for us. I have made it my job, if you like, to ensure that we promote a message of putting locals first in the lead-up to Christmas for the job opportunities that creates for young people in our community. I think it is a great credit to the parents group of St Paul’s in Traralgon that they took the initiative themselves and undertook a fundraiser at the same time to support their school.

In the time that I do have left I would like to commend the report and the members of the standing committee for the work they have done on this very important issue. I encourage the
ministers responsible to have a close look at the recommendations, in particular at the opportunities to support young people as they find the right balance between their academic careers and their working careers and set them on a pathway to succeed in life.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (11.13 am)—I am feeling a bit of angst at the moment because I am supposed to be in the House speaking on some other legislation. This is a very important report and I was really proud to be a part of it. It is just by coincidence that I too would like to congratulate the chair of the committee, the member for Cunningham, Sharon Bird, who is currently in the chamber. I also have my colleague the member for Makin, my friend Tony Zappia, and the secretary of the inquiry, Dr Worthington, in the chamber. That is terrific and I do thank them all very much for participating. I also thank the member for Gippsland for his contribution and support for the report and also for his interest in youth affairs. I know, like many in this place, he is very active about trying to do the right thing by his constituents and certainly by rural and regional Australia, so I congratulate him on that.

The name of the report is Adolescent Overload. It is a report of the inquiry into combining school and work, and into supporting successful youth transitions. That is exactly what it is. Mr Deputy Speaker, you and I have been on committees together for some time and I have prided myself on coming up with titles for committees. The member for Mallee is in the House at the moment and no doubt we will be discussing the name of our next report as well. But I was hoping this one would be called ‘The New Working Class’ or ‘The Working Class’, but I was outvoted. However, that is what the report is essentially about: students working and the important transition from the world of school to the world of work, as well as how we can go about supporting them. I think ‘delicate balance’ is the term we use for it. Chapter 3 is headed ‘School and work: a delicate balance’. Stephanie, a student from New South Wales, summed it up really well. On page 21 of the report she is quoted as saying:

It is very important to me to have a job—it means I am earning money—yet the HSC is also vital. Finding the balance is so important. I don’t think many people know how to do this.

That is really at the heart of our interest in this phenomenon—I think Australia heads the list worldwide in terms of students who are at school, particularly middle school and a little higher, and also doing part-time work—and it is a phenomenon that the member for Cunningham alluded to earlier. Maybe investigating some of the sociological reasons in comparative terms would have been really interesting, too. Anyway, many, many young people do combine work and school. I think the figure quoted in the report is something like 260,000 young people doing this, so it is really important that we have a look at the nature and extent of it and how we might be able to assist.

I think my colleagues would agree that, apart from the terrific aspect of getting around and meeting young people, and having many of them make submissions to the inquiry, the experience for most people was really positive. Some of them spoke with genuine enthusiasm and pride in what they did. What really struck me was when we were comparing our youth—and mine goes much further back than the very honourable member for Cunningham’s. I worked in a milk bar until they worked out that, apart from my arithmetic, I was not going that well. I was all thumbs and fingers on the cash register, so they moved me to the milk, but then I discovered the cigarette stand and started smoking, so I did not work there for long. However, the idea is that it was a rarity to have to go to work then—I certainly did not have to—and it was a very strange world to have young people where the adults were. However, that is not

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the case today; young people, as we learnt through this inquiry, are doing a full range of work with high levels of responsibility. I think that is where a lot of the pressure points are that a number of these students commented on.

Many students want to work for a whole variety of reasons, and I will outline some of the positive aspects listed in the report. One reason is to enhance a student’s confidence and self esteem, and it certainly seemed to do that for a lot of students that we met. Another is to contribute to their financial wellbeing. That included those who have to work to support their families and there were some pretty sad cases there. You could be looking at the body of a young person but into the eyes of someone who had already had a life experience supporting a family while struggling with school; it was quite moving in some instances.

For others of course it was to get some financial independence from their parents. Many said that they did not want to have to rely on their parents. It is funny, isn’t it, that as they strive for financial independence the parliament over a number of years has increased the age of dependence to 25—and now we are negotiating about bringing it down again. But the reality is that young people seem to be becoming more independent a lot earlier in life but we have put the age of independence out further and further. That seems to be an incongruity between reality and what we are demanding of young people for financial reasons. Perhaps it is saving the budget bottom line, but I do not know how it is assisting people to meet the material needs that they deem necessary in their lives.

Regarding facilitating the development of social networks, the member for Cunningham gave some really good examples of how young people’s world has been expanded. When we were at school we had our school friends but young people now have another world out there—I do not mean just the nightclubs—where they work and take up responsible positions.

I sometimes think—and it certainly came through from some of the discussions we had—that a lot of schools are not even aware of the incredible skill sets that a number of young people have because of their widening social network. What they can do often is not recognised. It is not on their reports and it does not seem to be recognised when references are written. It is as if the worlds of school and work are so totally separate that you cannot connect them. I think this report makes it very clear that we are dealing with a phenomenon where they are intersecting all the time.

The report says students will be allowed to gain useful knowledge and independence and exercise greater responsibility and self-reliance. Well, everybody in this chamber would acknowledge those very important life skills. Certainly the world of work allows them to do that.

Regarding the idea of instilling a work ethic and attitude, I hope there is work ethic and right attitudes at school, but paid work is outside the confines of school and that means they are getting a double dose. This is interesting. The criticism of young people often is that they do not have a work ethic, that they have an attitude problem. Well, they go to work and you hope they are increasing their work ethic and their positive attitudes to work there. Hopefully that is also happening in the schools, but some of the reference is that we are not succeeding in either place—that makes you wonder. Maybe our expectations are so unrealistic these days and we look back to a golden age when we think everything was perfect—

Mr Zappia—It was!
Ms Bird—We were perfect!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Look at us—this chamber is full of people with work ethic and, hopefully, worth ethic. I tell you what: a lot of the young people have them both, and I think that bodes well for the future.

Finally, it is said that students will be enabled to develop work and organisational skills, including time management skills—indeed. Both my sons have had jobs and continue to work. One of them has excellent time management skills and the other one does not, so I think he needs some more work experience to develop those skills. But they are really important skills as we all know.

At page 24, the report quotes Dr Phil McKenzie from the Australian Council for Educational Research:

Working is a very positive experience in the main, as long as it is not an unreasonable number of hours or in an exploitative situation.

I reckon that sums up exactly what the students said about their experiences. They said they could handle the hours in the main as long as there were not too many. I think a lot of them said that about 20 hours were enough and that 15 hours were pretty reasonable. But also they wanted to be valued at work, and that leads me to some of the recommendations that this report makes. One of the main things that came out of the report for me was that employers—like everyone else in this world—enter into social relationships. In this case it is an economic as well as an employer-employee relationship, but in the end it is about valuing each other and what we do and, importantly in the work situation, about the customer.

Many employers that we spoke to were highly cognisant of the needs of young people in their dealings with young people and they were very fair. Some were not, but that was more out of ignorance than anything else. I suppose what the report is saying is: be aware of each other’s needs—from the student’s point of view, the needs of your employer. And you have got to communicate. Likewise, there is a responsibility on the employer to communicate with their employees—in this case, young people. We found that, essentially, some form of compact between the two is really important. If we can do that in a non-onerous way for employers, then I think that is really important. That is the same as a recommendation in here that some form of formal recognition of the employment record and the characteristics and the value of that employee for the employer would be very useful. So communication seems to be at the heart of this—it is at the heart of life, isn’t it? It is certainly at the heart of the workplace. When there are reasonable communications, then there is a good work experience, and I think that is really important.

We thank the schools very much, and I certainly thank my local schools. The committee were kind enough to come to Burnie, and we had the Burnie Chamber of Commerce on 21 April—a couple of days before a momentous event in world history, apart from Shakespeare’s birthday—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Seeker)—Do you know when it is, Member for Brad- don?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I do—it is the same day as my birthday, Mr Deputy Speaker! We had the Hellyer campus of the Tasmanian Academy, we had Latrobe High School, Penguin High School and Reece High School. I do thank them very much; it was a really good day.
An important thing to come out of that meeting was this: we asked, ‘Do you officially record if your students work—part-time or whatever?’ The essential answer was no. I do not know how many other schools are like this, but I think it is fairly fundamental that your school knows you are involved in the world of work. One, I would have thought it is pretty important to know your student anyway; and, two, it might be pretty important—as we enter into this almost case-managing, flexible learning mode that we are moving towards, and which is really important—to understand and recognise the skills and competencies that your students have before they get to school, particularly at the senior secondary level. That just struck me as being pretty fundamental because they are adding to the stock of the skills and competencies of your campus. Some said that they knew at the individual class level, but then you do not understand it from the generic level of the school—if you are looking at behaviour patterns of students and their work and so on. So I suppose what we are saying is that communication is at the heart of these social contracts. It is really important in terms of formal records that people have an understanding of what their students are doing outside of the classroom because it has a bearing on what happens in the classroom.

In summary, the title Adolescent overload? is followed by a question mark. I am not sure there was an overload, however. I think most students really got the balance right. They are definitely a new working class and I was really pleased that that description tends to fit the report. I thank all those who participated in this inquiry, particularly our chair, the secretary, my fellow members who took part and everyone who made submissions.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (11.28 am)—As a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, I certainly welcome this opportunity to comment on the report, Adolescent overload? Report of the inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions. I will begin by thanking the chair, Sharon Bird—the member for Cunningham, who is in the chamber right now—for her leadership and commitment to this inquiry. In fact her own personal experience in education proved to be invaluable in assisting the committee in carrying out its inquiry and its report. I also thank the secretariat, led by Dr Glenn Worthington, for their support and also for their excellent summary of the committee’s work which is reflected in this report.

I particularly thank the committee for coming to my electorate of Makin in the course of the inquiry and visiting Para Hills High School to see and hear firsthand from teachers and students at that school. Regrettably I was unable to join the committee on the visit, but I do frequently visit Para Hills High School. I have a longstanding association with the school and in fact will be attending the school’s graduation ceremony next week. Through that longstanding association, I am very much aware of the school’s activities and its commitment to vocational education and providing career pathways for its students. When I have attended the school over the years—with the previous principal, Trevor Rogers, and with the current principal, Janette Scott—I have seen firsthand how that school is responding through its specific understanding of the needs of the students that attend the school. From my experience of the region generally, each of the high schools are confronted with different challenges, and that is one school that has understood those challenges and responded with the right kinds of policies that have enabled it to give students who attend the school the best possible support that it can.
Combining school with work has both positive and negative consequences, dependent on factors such as the nature of the work, the number of hours worked, the family support, and the personal qualities, characteristics and abilities of the individual—all matters that you, Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, as a member of the committee along with me, would have noted in the submissions that were made to the inquiry. Whilst there certainly are considerable positive elements involved with young people being engaged in work—and no-one disputes them—I want to focus my remarks on the negative aspects of secondary students combining school and work.

Again, the findings are variable. Although it is generally accepted that excessive work hours ultimately do have a negative impact on a student’s educational success and future career opportunities, the fact of the matter is that the effects change from student to student and from region to region, due to a range of factors, including the way the school manages the students who are engaged in work. It would appear to me, however, that combining study with up to about 10 hours of work per week or thereabouts is manageable by most young people without seriously affecting their educational outcomes. Beyond that, the impacts become more noticeable.

A number of members of the committee have commented on young people who work in fast food outlets. Two weeks ago it was McHappy Day in South Australia—and perhaps across Australia—where the McDonald’s chain of fast-food outlets raises money for, in Adelaide, Ronald McDonald House. As I usually do, I went and worked at the local McDonald’s fast food outlet for a couple of hours. It was non-stop work for the couple of hours I was there. I contemplated what it must have been like for the young girl who had been working there since six o’clock in the morning and was due to finish at two o’clock in the afternoon. That would have been an eight-hour shift. All I can say is that I am sure she would have been looking forward to the end of her shift, because the work pressure I observed there was intense.

A survey that was presented to the committee in respect of the hours that young people participate in employment showed that 30 per cent of students in employment work one to six hours, 44 per cent work six to 12 hours, 21 per cent work 12 to 20 hours, five per cent work 20 to 30 hours and one per cent work in excess of 30 hours per week. The good thing about that survey is that 74 per cent, or three-quarters, of the students who are working work for 12 hours or less per week, which, as I said earlier, I believe is manageable. I particularly note the effect of work on male students, with evidence presented to the committee pointing to male students engaged in part-time work being less likely to complete year 12. Evidence from Vickers, Lamb and Hinkley found:

Males who work 5 to 15 hours per week during Year 9 are approximately 40 per cent less likely to complete Year 12 than those who do not, while males who work more than fifteen hours per week … are approximately 60 per cent less likely to complete Year 12

The report further states:

Females who work part-time during Year 9 are much more likely to complete Year 12 than their male counterparts.

I have two observations to make about that. It is clear that young males who engage in part-time work during the course of their high school years are more likely to be distracted from continuing with their education studies and pursuing a tertiary education and may enter the
workforce much earlier. That is a concern. It is clear that those effects are not as bad amongst females who work whilst they are at high school.

The concern, however, is that, on the one hand, we may want young people to engage in some part-time work because of the beneficial aspects of it but, on the other hand, we run the serious risk of distracting them from what should be their long-term career aspirations. It certainly is of concern that young males appear to be less able to handle work situations than females. I am not quite sure why that is but it certainly appears to be the case. Those figures that were presented in the report certainly confirm the evidence of my own observations from attending schools over the years and seeing firsthand how many of the young males that undertake part-time work do not ultimately complete year 12. If you want to look at those statistics a bit more closely you will note that when you go to year 12 graduations it is likely that you will see more females graduating than males. And that is confirmation of those trends.

I will take a moment to talk about the educational impacts on young people who are both carers and in employment. These young people are particularly at risk. According to Carers Australia—I refer to paragraph 7.32 in the report—only four per cent of primary carers between the ages of 15 and 25 years are still in education compared to 23 per cent of the general population in that age group. That is four per cent of carers compared to 23 per cent—one sixth—who continue with their education. In that same reference we see: 60% of young primary carers aged 15-25 are unemployed or not in the labour force, compared with 38% for the general population in the same group.

I comment on that aspect of young people in employment for the following reason. I was able to host a forum relating to disabilities in the electorate of Makin with the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, the Hon. Bill Shorten. At that forum I can very clearly recall two young ladies—both still trying to study—who stood up and said, ‘As carers trying to get an education we need more assistance if we are going to be able to complete our education.’ They were literally pleading with the parliamentary secretary for the government to provide more support for them.

You can just imagine and appreciate their situation. They were trying to go to school but they would come home from school and be full-time carers of their mothers. And, in addition to being carers, they were trying to juggle a few hours of work to make ends meet—not just for themselves but for the household. To see those people, at such a young age, be burdened with such significant responsibility was heartbreaking. So I am pleased that the report touches on that aspect of young people’s lives. I note that the report comments also on the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing, and Youth, which also made reference to this issue. It is an important issue and I certainly support the pleas for additional government support for young students who find themselves as carers in the community.

Most speakers have already made the point that students often work out of financial necessity, and that is absolutely the case. For years, I have been representing people from the northeastern and northern communities of Adelaide. It is an area, particularly the northern suburbs of Adelaide, which is considered to be of lower socioeconomic status. Time and time again, I have seen young people, either because they come from broken homes or because the income level of the household is simply insufficient, literally forced to go and work.
It is sad because those young people frequently have the intellectual capacity to be real achievers if given the opportunity to pursue tertiary studies. In fact, some recent studies carried out by the University of South Australia confirm that—those young people from lower socioeconomic status areas who have been given an opportunity to go to university are, once given that break, performing just as well as students from other areas. The sad thing about it is that those same young people, because they are forced into work situations, in turn have their studies interrupted or affected, and sometimes they are unable to perform well at school, simply because of the hours that they are working. In turn, they do not complete year 12 and do not go on to university. So the whole cycle of disadvantage is perpetuated when they, in turn, settle down, have a home and try to survive on a low income, perhaps because they never completed any form of tertiary education.

Another aspect is that, quite often, we see those young people faced with serious health problems as a result of: (a) working too long; and (b) abusing their bodies both physically and nutritionally, through not getting the right types of food into their system, because they are working too long and rushing from one place to another. I am very much aware of that. I think it was Kostas Papadopoulos from Para Hills High School who made the point that many young people, when they get to school, are taking excessive amounts of these energy-boosting drinks just to get through the day. I am very much aware of that because I have seen it for myself.

I will finish by making this point: the Rudd government is absolutely committed to education. The government has invested a record amount of $62.8 billion over the next triennium because it recognises and understands the importance of education both to the individual and to the national economy. It is a commitment and a priority that I thoroughly endorse.

The government investment, however, whilst critical, needs to take into account other factors which may affect educational outcomes. This report, I believe, not only comments about those other factors but also raises awareness of what they are. Dealing with this issue is a complex area of public policy because, as I stated earlier, there are positive and negative aspects of it and there is a wide variety of considerations. But it is an important area of public policy which we, as a parliament, should be aware of when we make and consider education policies. We need to understand what the real world for students is like. Once again I commend the report to the House for consideration and thank all the other members of the committee who I worked with on this report.

Debate (on motion by Mr Danby) adjourned.

Economics Committee Report

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (11.44 am)—by leave—I speak in relation to the report entitled Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report 2008. It is an important report and it is one of only two opportunities a year that this parliament gets to have the Reserve Bank governor and other Reserve Bank officials before us to ask questions about monetary policy and fiscal policy and how it is working. It is a little bit of a shame that we have no-one from the other side here to speak in relation to this matter, but I suppose it is no surprise given the opposition’s lack of questions in question time about the economy and jobs that they have
not been able to have someone here to speak on this important issue. I think it has been over 400 days since there has been a question by the opposition on small business in question time.

In talking about this report it is important to look at the context in which the Reserve Bank has been operating in the last 18 months in terms of the global financial crisis. It is best to look at what the Reserve Bank governor himself said about this crisis and how serious it is because some of those opposite have made comments inferring that this was not such a great crisis at all. The Reserve Bank governor is quite clear when he says:

Let us take the G7 countries as a group. There is a data series for G7 GDP as a group that goes back to 1960. It is compiled by the OECD. … we will find that this is the biggest contraction in the history of that series. It is the sharpest contraction in that 50 years. It is probably only a bit bigger than some of really sharp ones we saw in the mid-70s, but nonetheless it is a big one. So you have got, as I said in the opening statement, a financial turn of events which really spun out of control…. You had tremendous turmoil and instability.

So we have this massive global downturn that this government and the Reserve Bank were faced, a downturn that was affecting all the economies around the world. We have to look at what this government actually did with its fiscal policy, and the responses it made to try to protect Australia. We did this by three waves of stimulus. Phase one included the cash payments. Because the global financial recession was unfolding so rapidly, it was crucial that the government design a fiscal policy response that could be implemented quickly to provide immediate support and growth to jobs. That is what this first phase, these targeted one-off cash payments predominantly to low- and middle-income households, was about. These payments were making sure that we could rapidly get money out into the economy to help sustain jobs that were at risk. This first full phase of the cash stimulus included $8.7 billion in one-off cash payments for pensioners, carers and low- and middle-income families. Then there was $12.2 billion in one-off cash payments for working Australians and eligible families, students and drought affected farmers which was announced as part of the second stage, the $42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan in February 2009; a plan that the opposition voted against. The effect of this was that cash money was out in the community sustaining jobs.

In my electorate of Dobell, we have a particularly high proportion of people who are employed in retail. We also have higher than average unemployment. Without this cash stimulus, jobs in my electorate were going to go quickly, because jobs in retail are often casual and jobs in retail are often among the most vulnerable to downturns. The cash stimulus certainly had a terrific effect in sustaining employment in the retail sector and in my electorate.

The second phase of the fiscal policy was shovel-ready infrastructure. The Nation Building and Jobs Plan included a $29.9 billion investment in shovel-ready infrastructure projects across the country. This second phase of stimulus spending on investments in schools, housing, energy efficiency, roads and community infrastructure and support for small business adds directly to growth and helps support jobs—and local jobs—while providing lasting benefits for the future. We all have examples of the redevelopment that is happening in our schools and the local jobs that are there.

One of the stories I would like to share is in relation to one of the schools in my electorate, Tacoma Public School. They are getting a community hall, which is well underway now, for $2 million. While Bovis Lend Lease is the overarching contractor in relation to it, the builders are Stevens Construction, a local company. They are employing local people at the Tacoma
Public School to build this community hall on the school site. Sixty people are being employed—60 locals who would be struggling to have jobs on the Central Coast, struggling to go to Sydney and get jobs, without this initiative.

It has far-reaching effects in providing not just jobs but also skilled jobs and helping the skills of the construction industry continue into the future. One of the people I met on the site was Rob, who was a third-year apprentice carpenter who had been out of work for six months and struggling to finish his apprenticeship. We know, when there are downturns and apprenticeships are not finished, that when we come out of the downturn we always suffer from the skills shortage. So it is important to make sure that apprentices are employed. Rob was one of two new apprentices employed specifically for this job. He would not have been able to finish his apprenticeship without this investment in critical infrastructure.

The third phase is the critical economic infrastructure. Here the government has made a $22 billion investment in the longer term nation-building infrastructure needed to boost Australia’s productivity and growth. This is an investment in roads, rail, ports, universities and hospitals. It will support jobs now but it will also allow Australia to take full advantage of the global economic recovery as it comes out.

There were three phases of the fiscal program: cash injections early on, shovel-ready infrastructure in the medium term and, in the longer term, the long-term infrastructure that this country needs to provide extra jobs.

We can then look at what the Reserve Bank governor said about the response that the government took with its fiscal program. He said, following on from his comments about the tremendous turmoil and instability that the global economy was facing:

That required, I think, a response by policymakers to the turmoil itself in order to stabilise the financial system and stop that spiralling down any further. That itself is very hard to do, but, as I say, I think that the truly extraordinary things that were done did avert what could have been a really disastrous outcome.

It is quite clear from the Reserve Bank governor that the strategies the Rudd government put in place were absolutely vital to ensure that the Australian economy was cushioned from the worst effects of this global financial recession.

The evidence is already in in terms of the effects that it has had and how well Australia has done. The Australian economy grew by 0.4 per cent in the March quarter, 0.6 per cent in the June quarter and 0.6 per cent over the past year. Without the economic stimulus, Treasury estimates that the economy would have contracted by around 0.2 per cent in the March quarter, 0.3 per cent in the June quarter and 1.3 per cent through the year to June. That would have meant that Australia experienced three consecutive quarters of negative GDP. This was averted because of the actions of this government in providing the economic stimulus.

In terms of jobs, our unemployment rate has gone up. That is something we all regret and is not good news. But the unemployment rate is at 5.8 per cent. That is lower than in all but one of the major advanced economies. Without the economic stimulus package, Treasury estimates that up to 210,000 more jobs would be lost to the global recession and that unemployment would peak around 1½ percentage points higher than it will because of the intervention of this government. So we have had a direct effect in making sure we protect Australian jobs as best we possibly can from the global financial crisis.
It is little wonder then that the opposition no longer talk about jobs. I do remember some 12 months ago the Leader of the Opposition saying, ‘jobs, jobs, jobs’. It is a long time since he spoke about jobs and it is a long time since he spoke about the economy, and that is because he knows this government has done a great job of protecting Australian jobs and stimulating the economy.

And it is not just the Reserve Bank governor who has praised the government’s response to the global financial crisis. The CBA chief economist has said:

… a policy induced lift in consumer spending, house purchases, equipment and public spending were the key drivers of growth. The Australian economy will continue to benefit from the economic policy stimulus in 2009. We are not there yet, but that stimulus should get us through to the point where a self-sustaining recovery takes over.

The global strategist from TD Securities has said:

To be sure, Australia is a star performer in this global financial and economic crisis. The government and the RBA have implemented policies to cushion the downturn and have done a great job.

Craig James has said:

The stimulus put in place by the government has done the trick in insulating the economy from the global doom.

So we have got economists all around Australia saying the government’s response was the appropriate one.

At the last hearing there was some discussion about whether we should relax the stimulus because of the improved conditions in the Australian economy. The only people pushing this line are the opposition, who did not support the stimulus in the first place. But we should listen to what the authorities have said about relaxing the stimulus policy even further than what is planned. The International Monetary Fund has said:

The authorities’ timely and significant macro policy response cushioned the domestic impact of global financial crisis.

The US Treasury Secretary has said:

The classic errors of economic policy during crises are that governments tend to act too late, with insufficient force, and then put the brakes on too early. We are not going to repeat those mistakes.

But most poignant are the comments made by the Treasurer of Western Australia when asked whether the Commonwealth should pull back on its stimulatory package. He said:

I think that would be far too premature to argue for the Commonwealth to pull back on a stimulatory package.

So even the Liberal Treasurer of Western Australia understands the policy position that this government has put in place, understands that it is important that we make sure that we see this stimulus package through, understands the effect the stimulus has had in terms of cushioning the economy and, most importantly, understands the effect it has had in terms of saving jobs.
This is a situation that everyone around Australia seems to understand, including all the economic experts and even the Liberal government in Western Australia. The only people who do not seem to understand the importance of the stimulus package are those who sit opposite. It is quite clear that the Reserve Bank governor’s loosening of monetary policy by dropping interest rates by more than 400 basis points was consistent with the stimulus package. It is also quite clear that the tightening of monetary policy from the emergency lows at the height of the crisis was also exactly in line with the timing of the government’s fiscal policy to stimulate the economy and to reduce that stimulation over time.

This is an important report that comes out twice a year. It gives this parliament the opportunity to question the Reserve Bank governor to gauge exactly where he sees monetary policy and fiscal policy going. I say again that this report and the Reserve Bank governor’s response are a resounding tick for the policies of the Rudd government and the way in which they handled the global financial crisis.

Debate (on motion by Ms George) adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 12.00 pm