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SITTING DAYS—2010

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH 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. Anthony John Abbott 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

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Members of the House of Representatives

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Members of the House of Representatives

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

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
RUDD MINISTRY—continued

Minister for Veterans’ Affairs Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Home Affairs Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Assistant Treasurer Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Ageing Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secretary for Voluntary Sector Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Employment Hon. Jason Clare MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Health Hon. Mark Butler MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry Hon. Richard Marles MP
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<tr>
<td>Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the</td>
<td>Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Truss MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy and Leader of the</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Minchin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposition in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<td>and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training</td>
<td>Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water</td>
<td>Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Attorney-General</td>
<td>Senator Hon. George Brandis SC</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator Hon. David Johnston</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Andrews MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
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<td>The Nationals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance and Debt Reduction and Leader</td>
<td>Senator Barnaby Joyce</td>
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<td>of the Nationals in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Food Security, Fisheries and</td>
<td>Hon. John Cobb MP</td>
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<td>Forestry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Deregulation, Competition</td>
<td>Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<td>Policy and Sustainable Cities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Smith MP</td>
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<td>Economy</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>Mr Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chairman of the Coalition Policy Development Committee</td>
<td>Hon. Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
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Shadow Minister for Tourism and the Arts and Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport
Mr Steven Ciobo MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Apprenticeships and Training
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs, Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Childcare and Shadow Minister for the Status of Women
Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP

Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs
Mr Michael Keenan MP

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

Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs
Mrs Louise Markus MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Apprenticeships and Training
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Emerging Trade Markets
Mr Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education and School Curriculum Standards
Mrs Jo Gash MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray Darling Basin and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Public Security and Policing
Senator Simon Birmingham

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Mr Jason Wood MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services, Health and Wellbeing
Mr Stuart Robert MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector
Dr Andrew Southcott MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Housing and Human Services and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship
Senator Mitch Fifield

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport
Mr Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for National Security and Policing
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Architecture, Design and Environment
Senator Hon. George Brandis

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Budget and Revenue
Senator Cory Bernardi

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ethnic Affairs
Senator Reon Butler

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Arts, Culture and Communications
Senator Hon. Martin Ferguson

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy, Water and the Environment
Senator Hon. Larry Springborg

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Communications, the Arts and the Environment
Senator Hon. Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts and the Environment
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and the Environment
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Cybersecurity
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Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Cybersecurity
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldso
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The Governance of Australian Government Superannuation Schemes Bill 2010 (the bill) is part of a package of bills to establish governance arrangements for Commonwealth superannuation schemes that are effective and consistent with those in the broader superannuation industry. The package of bills also modernises some aspects of Commonwealth superannuation arrangements without altering members’ entitlements.

The bill gives effect to the government’s announcement, in October 2008, to merge the trustees for the main civilian and military superannuation schemes—that is, the Australian Reward Investment Alliance, the Military Superannuation and Benefits Board and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Authority—to form a single trustee body from 1 July 2010.

The single trustee will become responsible for managing the main civilian and military superannuation schemes. These schemes are the:

- Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme;
- Public Sector Superannuation Scheme;
- Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan;
- Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme;
- Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme; and
- Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme.

The single trustee will also assume responsibility for the superannuation scheme established by the Superannuation Act 1922 and the Papua New Guinea Scheme from the Commissioner for Superannuation, which the ComSuper Bill 2010, being introduced cognately with this bill, seeks to abolish with effect from 1 July 2010.

Establishing a single trustee for the military and civilian superannuation schemes will not affect, in any way, ministerial responsibility for defence superannuation policy and arrangements. This responsibility will remain with ministers in the defence portfolio. As such, ministers in the defence portfolio will continue to be responsible for any future policy changes regarding military superannuation.

The merger of the existing trustees is aimed at strengthening the governance of Commonwealth superannuation schemes and providing efficiencies in trustee operations in line with trends across the superannuation industry generally.

Based on figures reported as at 30 June 2009, the merger will bring more than 650,000 members and pensioners and nearly $19 billion in funds under the management of the single trustee body. This will provide an opportunity for increased scale of operations and for more effective and streamlined investment operations. It will also help to attract and retain quality board members and staff and provide access to higher levels of
service from providers and greater options for investment of fund moneys.

These outcomes will benefit members as well as the Commonwealth as the employer sponsor of the schemes, and will provide a more sustainable basis for delivering Commonwealth superannuation in the future.

As I have already indicated, establishing the single trustee for the military and civilian superannuation schemes will not change or affect, in any way, the superannuation benefits of members of the schemes. This means, for example, that the existing features and benefits that reflect the special nature of military service in the Australian Defence Force, such as death and disability arrangements, will be maintained.

The bill establishes the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC) as the single trustee by continuing in existence the body corporate formerly known as the Australian Reward Investment Alliance.

Under the bill, CSC will be a Commonwealth authority for the purposes of the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997 (CAC Act). The CAC Act will apply to CSC subject to some modifications with regard to managing and investing scheme funds. For example, CSC will not be required to notify significant events related to these activities to the responsible minister. This modification reflects the fact that CSC will separately be subject to prudential supervision under the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993.

The bill also provides that CSC will have a governing board comprising a chair and 10 directors, who will be appointed on a part-time basis. The board size reflects the increased responsibility of the trustee and more diverse membership of the schemes that fall under the management of CSC.

Both military and civilian interests will be represented on the board of CSC. The Chief of the Defence Force will be responsible for nominating two employee representatives and I will consult the ministers in the defence portfolio on suitable candidates for the five employer representative positions.

CSC will also be able to establish committees to deal with specific issues, including those related to the schemes for Australian Defence Force members, such as the payment of disability and death benefits. For example, CSC can establish a dedicated Defence Force case assessment committee, with representation from each of the three services. This will allow for the continuation of the current role and function of the DFRDB Authority within the framework of the single trustee.

Many of the remaining provisions in the bill are to continue governance arrangements that apply to the existing trustees.

The bill is a testament to the government’s commitment to maintaining strong, contemporary governance arrangements for Commonwealth superannuation schemes that are beneficial to members and the Commonwealth.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

COMSUPER BILL 2010
First Reading
Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Tanner.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading
Mr Tanner (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (9.07 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The ComSuper Bill 2010 is one of a package of bills to implement reforms that will establish governance arrangements for Common-
wealth superannuation schemes that are effective and consistent with those in the broader superannuation industry. The package of bills also modernises Australian government superannuation without changing the entitlements of members of the schemes.

This bill will establish ComSuper and provide that it is a statutory agency for the purposes of the Public Service Act 1999 consisting of a chief executive officer, as head of the agency, and staff. The bill will also provide that ComSuper will be a prescribed agency for the purposes of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997.

The bill will modernise the governance structure of ComSuper as a statutory agency with executive management, and clarify ComSuper’s functions.

The function of the CEO will be to provide administrative services to the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC), which will be established as the trustee of the main Australian government civilian and military superannuation schemes from 1 July 2010 by the Governance of Australian Government Superannuation Schemes Bill 2010. The CEO will be responsible for providing administrative services to CSC in respect of the following superannuation schemes:

- the scheme established under the Superannuation Act 1922, referred to as the 1922 scheme;
- the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme, or CSS;
- the Public Sector Superannuation Scheme, or PSS;
- the Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan, or PSSAP;
- the scheme provided for under the Papua New Guinea (Staffing Assistance) Act 1973, known as the Papua New Guinea Scheme;
- the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme, or DFRB Scheme;
- the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme, or DFRDB Scheme; and
- the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme, or MSB Scheme.

The CEO will be appointed by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, and the CEO’s remuneration will be determined by the Remuneration Tribunal.

The CEO is responsible for managing ComSuper, and will not be subject to direction by CSC in relation to his or her responsibility under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997, the Public Service Act 1999, or any other law of the Commonwealth in relation to the management of ComSuper.

The arrangements proposed in the bill were announced in the Minister for Finance and Deregulation’s press release No. 80 of 26 November 2009.

I commend the bill to the House

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Tanner.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Superannuation Legislation (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Prov-
Bill 2010 supports significant reforms to the governance of Commonwealth superannuation that are included in the Governance of Australian Government Superannuation Schemes Bill 2010 and the ComSuper Bill 2010 respectively.

The bill makes consequential amendments to a range of other Commonwealth acts of parliament to take account of the changes to governance arrangements for Commonwealth superannuation schemes.

The bill makes the management of the superannuation scheme established by the Superannuation Act 1922 and the Papua New Guinea Scheme the responsibility of the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC), the single trustee body for the main civilian and military superannuation schemes from 1 July 2010.

It also puts in place transitional arrangements necessary for the reforms. The transitional provisions will facilitate the transfer of assets and liabilities of the Military Superannuation and Benefits Board (MSB Board) and the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Authority (DFRDB Authority) to CSC. These provisions will also ensure that references to the MSB Board, the DFRDB Authority and the Commissioner for Superannuation in legislation and instruments will be read as CSC, where this is appropriate.

The bill will also enable CSC to transfer the assets of the Military Superannuation and Benefits Fund to the existing ARIA Investments Trust without creating a situation whereby capital gains tax would be payable. This is provided the transfer occurs on or before 1 July 2011. The ARIA Investments Trust is a pooled superannuation trust which currently holds the assets of the main civilian superannuation funds, that is, the assets relating to the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme and the Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan.

The bill also amends the Superannuation Act 2005 to facilitate public sector employees being able to consolidate their superannuation savings under the management of one trustee.

I commend the bill to the House.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4)
2009-2010
Second Reading
Mr Tanner (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (9.13 am)—On indulgence. On 26 November 2009 Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 was introduced into the House. The second reading of the bill stated:

…$114.9 million has been reclassified from administered expenses in Appropriation Act (No. 1) to make payments direct to local government for the East Kimberley Development Package.

I wish to advise the House that the amount specified for the East Kimberley Development Package in the second reading speech was incorrect and that the appropriation proposed to make payments direct to local governments for this package is in fact $14.9 million.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN) BILL 2010
First Reading
Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Brendan O’Connor.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading
Mr Brendan O’Connor (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (9.14 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.
General introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Australia in 1990 and has achieved almost universal ratification, imposes an obligation on states to protect children, at both the national and international level, from sexual exploitation and abuse.

In 1994, the then Keating Labor government enacted a suite of new criminal offences targeting Australians who engage in the sexual abuse of children overseas, sometimes referred to as ‘child sex tourism’. The introduction of these offences fulfilled Australia’s international obligations to protect children internationally from sexual exploitation. As a result, Australia has an extensive framework in place to prevent, investigate and prosecute all forms of child exploitation. Since then, sadly, the Commonwealth’s response to abuse overseas has stagnated.

This government is committed to taking all necessary action to prevent harm to children from occurring both in Australia and overseas. The sexual exploitation of children is devastating to the children involved, their families, and their communities.

We have a duty to ensure that with overseas travel commonplace, and the internet making information about destinations more accessible, Commonwealth laws provide a significant deterrent to abuse and a sound basis for prosecuting offenders.

Equally, rapidly changing technologies and the anonymity that the internet provides have resulted in unprecedented opportunities for child sex offenders. Our laws need to keep pace with the speed of technological change.

In 2005, the Commonwealth also enacted a range of offences directed at the use of a ‘carriage service’, such as the internet or a mobile phone, for the sexual exploitation of children. This action was taken in response to the increasing use by offenders of new technical tools, such as the internet, to engage in the sexual exploitation of children.

This bill will implement a range of reforms to the 1994 and 2005 offence regimes to ensure that they remain effective and continue to meet the needs of law enforcement agencies in combating contemporary offending.

The proposed reforms will support the Australian Federal Police (AFP), who play a significant role in ensuring children and young people are safe, whether in a real or virtual environment.

The AFP, through its High Tech Crime Operations unit, is responsible for the investigation of crimes associated with online child sex exploitation and child sex tourism. The Child Protection Operations teams investigate and target offenders who travel offshore and commit sexual offences or sexual exploitation against children. The AFP works closely with foreign law enforcement agencies prosecuting these offenders in the foreign countries or using extraterritorial laws and conducting the prosecutions in Australia. The AFP also combats online child sexual exploitation in partnership with state, territory and international law enforcement agencies, government organisations and industry.

Broader consultation on the proposed reforms between September and October 2009 indicated strong support for the measures in this bill—from state and territory governments, child safety commissioners, and child protection organisations like Child Wise and Save the Children. Save the Children indicated that the changes to the child-sex related offences would ‘definitely strengthen Australia’s capacity to prosecute would be child sex offenders’, whilst Child Wise supported reforms that would see Australia ‘again be the leaders in international best practice in rela-
tion to the legislation and policing of child sex tourism’.

1. Child sex tourism

The bill improves the existing child sex tourism regime by introducing a number of critical new offences. These new offences ensure that conduct that would be criminal if it occurred in Australia is also criminal if it is perpetrated by Australians overseas.

The bill introduces new offences for steps leading up to actual sexual activity with a child. Australians who are grooming or procuring a child for sexual activity overseas may be punished by up to 12 years or 15 years imprisonment respectively. Preparing for or planning sexual activity with a child overseas will be punishable by 10 years jail.

These offences will make it easier for law enforcement to intervene before actual sexual activity takes place, preventing physical harm to the child occurring.

The government believes that particularly serious conduct should be recognised in Australia’s child sex tourism offence regime, through the introduction of specific offences that carry higher penalties.

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual abuse. Abuse is also often perpetrated by people who are in a position of trust in a child’s life. Abuse is also often perpetrated systematically, over an extended period of time.

The bill introduces new aggravated offences where the offender is in a position of trust or authority or where the child victim has a mental impairment and a new offence of persistent sexual abuse of a child, all carrying maximum penalties of 25 years imprisonment.

In addition, new offences of sexual activity with a young person between 16 and 18 where the offender is in a position of trust will subject offenders to penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment.

These offences are consistent with state and territory child sex offences which apply domestically.

The introduction of such offences sends a strong message to Australians who travel overseas to take up positions, such as teachers or aid workers, for the purpose of sexually exploiting children, that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

The bill increases penalties for existing child sex tourism offences from 17 to 20 years imprisonment for sexual intercourse with a child under 16 years, and from 12 to 15 years for other sexual activity with a child under 16 years. The bill also streamlines these offences and makes a clear distinction between these very serious offences, and the new procuring offences.

2. Overseas child pornography and child abuse material offences

Although dealings in child pornography and child abuse material can often be intimately connected with child sex tourism, there are currently no offences applying extraterritorially to dealings in such material by Australians.

Many destination countries lack effective laws against child pornography and child abuse material, or the capacity to enforce them and current Commonwealth, state and territory offences only criminalise dealings in child pornography or child abuse material within Australia.

The bill will insert new offences for dealings in child pornography or child abuse material overseas, ensuring that Australians engaging in such behaviour overseas can be prosecuted in Australia.

Child pornography and child abuse material involve the abuse of children and the
amplification and broadcast of the original offence through distribution of the material.

Offenders who are found to be possessing, controlling, producing, distributing, or obtaining such material outside Australia will be subject to maximum penalties of 15 years imprisonment. If the offence involves more than one person and conduct on several occasions, it will be punishable by up to 25 years imprisonment.

This aggravated offence is directed at people who are involved in heinous child pornography and abuse networks and is intended to reflect the increased levels of harm to children resulting from the demand created by these networks.

3. Online offences

Recent cases have demonstrated the scale of contemporary networks. The internet has allowed the development of organised, technologically sophisticated rings of child sexual abusers.

The bill also introduces a new aggravated offence directed at online child pornography networks where the perpetrator is in Australia. This offence will also be subject to the high penalty of 25 years imprisonment, reflecting the gravity of harm caused.

Unfortunately, the internet is creating demand for new material of ever greater levels of depravity and corruption, and the technology provides new opportunities for abuse to take place.

To combat this, the bill introduces two new internet offences. The first is directed at the use of a carriage service to transmit indecent communications to a child, carrying a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment. The offence will prevent the use of the internet or mobile phone to expose children to pornographic or indecent material.

The second will criminalise using a carriage service for sexual activity with a child.

Changes in technology mean that offenders can commit sexual offences against children online without meeting in ‘real life’. For example, an offender might engage in a sexual act in front of a webcam while a child watches online. The offence carries a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment.

Existing carriage service offences criminalise using the internet or other carriage service, to groom or procure a child for sexual activity. They also criminalise using a carriage service for child pornography or child abuse material. The bill also raises maximum penalties for existing online child pornography and child abuse material offences, from 10 to 15 years imprisonment.

This bill will strengthen online offences, ensuring the regime is sufficient to address the contemporary nature of offending.

4. Postal offences

The bill also introduces a suite of new offences directed at the use of the post for child sex related activity, such as the distribution of child pornography or for grooming or procuring a child.

Despite the advantages which the advent of the internet has brought offenders, there is evidence that some forms of child pornography material, such as homemade videos, are still being distributed through the post.

The new offences will mirror online offences and ensure that offenders are subject to consistent penalties regardless of the medium that they use.

5. Forfeiture of child pornography

The bill will introduce a comprehensive new scheme to allow for the forfeiture of child pornography or child abuse material, or articles containing such material, such as computers, derived from or used in the commission of a Commonwealth child sex offence.
Presently the only way that such material can be forfeited is through a post-conviction application under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. This is a lengthy process, and entirely unsuitable. Unless a conviction is obtained, child pornography and child abuse material must be returned to the owner, an outcome which is clearly as absurd as it is inappropriate.

6. Consequential amendments

The bill also makes minor consequential amendments to the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002, the Crimes Act 1914, the Surveillance Devices Act 2004 and the Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979 to ensure that existing law enforcement powers are available to combat the full suite of Commonwealth child sex offences, including new offences introduced by this bill.

Conclusion

This overdue bill contains a range of measures ensuring that the Commonwealth’s legal framework criminalising the sexual exploitation of children is both comprehensive and effective in dealing with contemporary offending.

Since the introduction of child-sex tourism laws in 1994, Australia has been at the forefront of international efforts to combat transnational child sexual exploitation. These reforms will ensure that Australia’s laws remain progressive and represent best practice both domestically and internationally.

Keeping our children, and the real and virtual worlds they inhabit, safe from predatory sexual behaviour is something I am confident we all support.

I commend this bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.
item 53C. This alteration limits the application of item 53C to goods entered for home consumption on or before 31 December 2009.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON) BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Clare.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (9.29 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (University College London) Bill 2010 makes a minor amendment to the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to add University College London as a Table C provider.

The Higher Education Support Act 2003 includes provision for a foreign university, operating in Australia to be listed as a Table C provider. This listing means that eligible domestic students studying with the university can access FEE-HELP.

FEE-HELP assists eligible domestic students studying for all higher education courses ranging from diploma to PhD by providing a loan for all or part of their tuition costs.

University College London is a non-profit organisation established under United Kingdom law, and has been approved to operate as a higher education provider in Australia by the South Australian government under the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes.

It commenced offering courses in Masters of Science in Energy and Resources in semester 1, 2010 and is anticipating an enrolment of 10 students this year.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION (TARGETED ASSISTANCE) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Clare.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (9.31 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.


The bill amends the table in subsection 14B(1) of the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 to include additional funding for the Sporting Chance program, in order to bring it into line with the Commonwealth’s suite of targeted assistance measures and to adjust the 2010 to 2012 appropriations agreed as part of the new federal financial relations framework.

By amending the appropriations under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 the Australian government can continue working with a range of stakeholders to develop and implement innovative measures to close the gaps.

In education, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is stark. Most Indigenous students meet minimum standards of reading, writing and numeracy, but
not nearly as many as their non-Indigenous classmates. For example, the 2009 NAPLAN results reveal a gap of 26.4 percentage points between the reading levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous year 5 students. When they reach year 9, NAPLAN reveals a 30-point gap between the writing levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The act provides an excellent vehicle to action good ideas—ideas that deliver results. The act maintains commitments to initiatives introduced by the former government, including the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program and the Sporting Chance program. The sum of $10.93 million over three years will be used to extend the activities under the Sporting Chance program, using sport to engage Indigenous students and show the value of education.

An example of the program’s achievements can be found in the work of the Clontarf Foundation. The foundation has been the major single provider of school based sports academies for boys under the Sporting Chance program since the projects commenced operations in 2007. They consistently achieve improvements in attendance, and report significant success in attainment to year 12 in the schools in which they operate. Mid-2009 reporting indicates that average attendance of students in Clontarf academies was 76 per cent, compared with 70 per cent.

Record Australian government investment in education is geared towards giving students from all backgrounds and all locations a chance to access a good education. By focusing on programs like the Sporting Chance that are delivering better education outcomes for Indigenous students, the Australian government is actively working to close the gap. The Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2010 can make an important contribution to that effort.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL AMENDMENT BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Clare.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (9.35 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This is an appropriation bill to support:

• the ongoing operations of the Australian Research Council

• and three specific initiatives.

It will fund the high-quality research we need to address the great challenges of our time, to improve the quality of people’s lives, to support the development of new industries, and to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy.

The bill updates the special appropriation amount administered by the Australian Research Council to include:

• new funding for research in bionic vision science and technology

• new funding for the Super Science Fellowships scheme

• continued funding for National ICT Australia

• an additional outyear

• and indexation of existing appropriation amounts in the Australian Research Council Act 2001.

Inventing a bionic eye was one of the big ideas proposed by the Australia 2020 Summit in 2008.
The government has embraced this idea, which promises not only to give and restore sight to tens of thousands of people around the world, but also to generate know-how that can be applied in many other areas.

Australia is already a global leader in bi-onics. This new investment will reinforce our leadership in one of the most demanding and inspiring fields of scientific research.

The Super Science Fellowships scheme is an integral part of the $1.1 billion Super Science Initiative announced in the 2009 budget.

The Super Science Initiative furthers the objectives of the government’s innovation strategy, Powering Ideas, by building on Australia’s strengths in space science and astronomy, marine and climate science, and the sciences that will underpin the industries of the future, including biotechnology and nanotechnology.

While the Super Science Initiative is primarily about building the infrastructure needed to support cutting-edge research, it is also about nurturing the talented individuals who will perform that research.

The Super Science Fellowships scheme will offer 100 three-year fellowships to early-career researchers working in fields targeted by the initiative.

This is one of several measures the government has introduced to give the best local and international researchers a real chance to build a career in Australia.

Super Science Fellowships are designed to encourage and support the next generation of researchers. They complement our Australian Laureate Fellowships for established researchers and Future Fellowships for researchers in mid-career.

National ICT Australia—better known as NICTA—is the largest information and communication technology research organisation in Australia.

As well as undertaking user-inspired basic research, it also plays a vital part in research training and commercialising research outcomes through spin-out companies and technology licensing.

NICTA is funded jointly by the communications portfolio and by the innovation portfolio through the Australian Research Council.

The 2009 budget extended NICTA’s funding for another four years from 2011-12 so that it can continue its vital work. This bill gives effect to that decision.

In addition to providing for these specific measures, the bill also adjusts the Australian Research Council’s funding cap for the financial years beginning on 1 July 2009, 2010 and 2011 in line with indexation, and sets the funding cap for the financial year beginning on 1 July 2012.

The bill will increase spending by approximately $889.6 million over these four financial years.

The proposed amendments change only the administered special appropriation; they do not alter the substance of the act or increase departmental funds.

This is routine but important legislation that will advance our efforts to build a fairer and more prosperous Australia through innovation.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Public Works Committee

Reference

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.40 am)—On behalf of the Par-
That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Taxation Office at 735 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria.

The Australian Taxation Office proposes to undertake an integrated fit-out of new leased premises in the Melbourne CBD at an estimated out-turn cost of $50.88 million, exclusive of GST. The new premises will replace the ATO’s existing five leases in the Melbourne central business district. The leases for four of these properties will expire in 2012, with the remaining lease due to expire in 2017. It is expected that their collection into a new, single building will provide the ATO with considerable advantages in terms of building design, performance, long-term viability and maintenance. Subject to parliamentary approval, the proposed integrated fit-out works are scheduled to start in December 2010 and to be completed by 30 March 2012. The developer has initiated work on site with excavation and pier drilling of the basement areas. Ground works will begin in May this year. The ATO is expected to take up occupancy of the building in April 2012. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Treaties Committee Report

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.42 am)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I present the committee’s report entitled Report 108: Treaty tabled on 25 November 2009.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

NATIONAL BROADCASTING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 3 February, on motion by Mr Albanese:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (9.43 am)—The Rudd government believes the staff elected director on the ABC board is important to the makeup of the board. That is why we are reinstating this position. I have seen it work in private schools and companies, and it is always good when a board has an employee representative to inform its governance decisions.

The National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 will put an end to another shameful legacy of the Howard government and introduce a new order, where individuals are selected not because of their political stripes but because of their abilities, their qualifications and their experience. The Rudd government wants people on the ABC and SBS boards because of their knowledge, not because of their political baggage. Unfortunately it is true to say that we do not get to choose our families. Certainly some Christmases I have tried to do that, but we do not get to choose our families. However, we do get to choose what is best for our Aunt. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.45 am)—The purpose of the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 is to amend the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 and the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991 to implement a new merit based appointment process for the ABC and the SBS boards. The bill also reinstates the position of staff-elected director of the ABC board. Schedule 1 to the bill establishes a merit based appointment process for ABC and SBS non-executive direc-
tors with the following features. The assessment of applicants claims will be undertaken by an independent nomination panel established at arms-length from government. Vacancies will be widely advertised, at a minimum in national and/or state and territory newspapers, and on the website of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. The assessment of candidates will be made against a core set of selection criteria, supplemented where necessary with additional criteria as determined by the minister. A report containing a short list of recommended candidates will be provided to either the minister or Prime Minister by the nomination panel. Schedule 2 to the bill re-establishes the position of staff-elected director to the ABC board.

Mr Anthony Smith (Casey) (9.46 am)—I am pleased to take the opportunity to speak in this debate on the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009, a debate that began in the dying days of last year. As the member for Dunkley foreshadowed on 26 November last year and as the former shadow minister for communications, Senator Minchin, outlined last year, we will be moving two amendments later in this debate. Those amendments relate to the staff-elected position for the ABC board and the proposed ban under this legislation of former members of parliament and senior political staff from being eligible, under the new merit review process, to be considered for appointment to the board of the ABC. We believe this is a very obvious and cheap political stunt by the government. It seeks to give the impression that they are preventing any sense of bias in any respect. I am going to make a number of general points that those opposite know to be right and are beyond dispute, as my friend and colleague the member for Lyne said yesterday.

Firstly, this is ill-conceived and hypocritical. At one level it says that no member of parliament from a state, federal or territory government can ever at any point in their life be eligible for consideration as a future member of the ABC board—not to be appointed by a government minister but to be eligible for consideration, as the member for Lyne said last night. That is a typical cheap stunt that might satisfy those opposite, but let us consider what that means. It means that someone like Bob Carr, the former New South Wales Premier, could not be considered, many years on after a period outside of parliament. Under this legislation, of course, any political apparatchik who has not been a member of parliament or who has not been a senior staffer—say, a former national secretary of the ALP—could be considered for appointment.

Last night the rebuttal to the member for Lyne was that there have been all these political appointments—but those political appointments were not former members of parliament and would be eligible under this bill for consideration. The member for Lyne made the point, and the government speaker following him in seeking to rebut it amplified it: John Bannon, a former South Austra-
lian Premier, was on the ABC board. By the
time he had finished, both sides of parlia-
ment thought he had done a good job. Our
side of parliament thought he was a bad
premier. As Senator Minchin pointed out, he
did a good job. I am pretty sure, if you check
the record, that the former Labor government
of Paul Keating appointed Ian Macphee. This
bill says that there will be a merit process so
that people will be considered on merit but,
at the same time, it says certain people, for-
mer members of parliament and former sen-
ior staff—not junior staff; senior staff—are
banned for life from even being considered.

We are being reasonable, and we can un-
derstand that when you are a member of par-
liament or a senior staff member you are
heavily involved in the political process. But
why not after a period of say 18 months at
least allow these people to be considered? At
least if you care about letting the ABC get
the best people, let that merit process con-
sider them. If they find that someone is un-
suitable, so be it. What is so hypocritical is
that the minister is saying yes, we want a
merit based process that is arms-length ex-
cept that they are going to interfere and en-
sure that the merit based process does not
consider these applicants. The member for
Lyne was absolutely right.

The other point we make is that this is
completely at odds with the government’s
approach on other boards. The Prime Minis-
ter has appointed former Liberal ministers.
Where someone is capable on merit, they
should be considered. How many times have
we heard that, and how many times have we
seen those opposite nod in agreement? They
say the ABC board is different. Are they say-
ing all of those other boards are less impor-
tant? Are they saying that if someone is in-
herently after a period of time going to con-
duct themselves with bias, that does not mat-
ter in a diplomatic posting? Is that their
point? They know, now, that this is an over-
reach. It will be ineffective. You could ap-
point someone from Hawker Britton if the
merit review process agreed. In many re-
spects they would, I suggest, have a far more
political background than some senior advis-
ers. Think of a communications expert in the
minister’s office who 20 years down the
track might be able to make a contribution.
Indeed, it is lucky this is prospective—the
current Managing Director of the ABC once
worked as an adviser, many years ago. The
minister would not say he is doing a bad job
as the manager of the ABC.

We have said there should be a compro-
mise. The government should calmly see the
light of day on this and agree that after an
18-month cooling-off period—which is a
principle we say that they have established
with their ministerial code of conduct; we do
not say they are identical, but there are paral-
lels there—we should be consistent and al-
low these people to be considered. If the
merit review process finds them unsuitable,
then they are found to be unsuitable.

The aspect of this bill dealing with the re-
instatement of the staff-elected position on
the ABC board is something this side of the
House, this opposition, cannot support. It
was this side of the House, when in govern-
ment, that legislated to remove that position.
The reasons have been well articulated in
this debate. I accept there is a philosophical
difference between this side of the House
and the other side of the House, and I accept
that whilst the member for Lyne agrees with
me on my remarks up until this point, he has
a view different from what I am about to say
now. For very good reason our side the
House when in government took action to
remove the staff-elected position. The reason
was best articulated back in 2006 in the ex-
planatory memorandum to the Australian
Broadcasting Corporation Amendment Bill.
It stated:
The Bill addresses an ongoing tension relating to the position of staff-elected Director. A potential conflict exists between the duties of the staff-elected Director under paragraph 23(1)(a) of the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act to act in good faith in the best interests of the ABC, and the appointment of that Director via election by ABC staff. The election method creates a risk that a staff-elected Director will be expected by the constituents who elect him or her to place the interests of staff ahead of the interests of the ABC as a whole where they are in conflict.

More generally and critically, this staff-elected position is at odds with standard practice in Australian corporate governance. We made that position clear at the time and we took action.

We do not believe that the ABC has at all suffered from the absence of a staff-elected director—we really do not. We do not think the community is crying out to us saying, ‘We think the ABC is doing well, but it would just do so much better if we could get the staff-elected director back.’ We do not pick up that sentiment at all. My friend the member for La Trobe has walked in. He would have told me if he had picked up that sentiment—and he agrees that he has not. We will move an amendment to delete that section. As I have said publicly, and as was said in this House last year, I reiterate: we cannot and will not support the bill in either house if that amendment is not successful. I will confine my remarks there, in the knowledge that both of these amendments will be dealt with very shortly and I will have the opportunity to deal specifically with each of them a bit later this day.

Mr SDBOTTOM (Braddon) (10.01 am)—The legislation before us, the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009, will amend the Australian Broadcasting Act 1993 and the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991 to do two things in particular: establish in legislation the new merit based appointment process for ABC and SBS non-executive directors and reinstate the staff-elected director to the ABC board. Both of these aims were committed to by this government in 2007, and this is the honouring of that commitment.

For the sake of clarity and information, under the provisions of the bill, the position of the staff-elected director will be restored to the ABC board. Non-executive director vacancies on the ABC and SBS boards will be advertised nationally and frequently. An independent nomination panel for the purposes of transparency and accountability will short-list suitable candidates. There will be clear, merit based selection criteria for non-executive director positions. Where the government does not appoint a short-listed candidate, it will have to provide reasons to parliament—again reinforcing openness, transparency and accountability.

Under this legislation, the Prime Minister must consult with the Leader of the Opposition prior to recommending to the Governor-General the person to be appointed as the ABC chairperson. The appointment of current or former politicians or senior political staff will be prohibited, in the name of keeping the independence of the ABC and SBS away from political interference. I mentioned before that we committed to these initiatives prior to the 2007 federal election. These commitments were clear, and this is the fulfilment of those commitments, as would be expected by the electorate.

I would like to raise very quickly, if I may, a number of points that lay at the heart of this legislation—first and foremost, the merit based appointments of the non-executive directors. It is absolutely important, as all speakers so far have pointed out, that we have strong and independent national broadcasters. This is absolutely crucial to the fabric of our democracy. Indeed, it is a hallmark of our social communications in this country.
Therefore, it is incumbent on the ABC and SBS boards to be able to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the emerging digital and online environment. To this end, both organisations must have transparent and accountable governance processes, and that is at the heart of this legislation.

The ABC and SBS cannot function to their maximum capacity without boards of excellence. This legislation will ensure that all Australians will have an opportunity to nominate for a place on the ABC or SBS boards and all claims will be considered on their merits by an independent panel. In short, all future appointments will be governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit. Individuals who through their abilities, experience and qualities match the needs of the ABC and SBS will be selected. All future appointments to the ABC and SBS boards will be subject to independent scrutiny by the nomination panel. As mentioned earlier, the process promotes the principles of equal opportunity and gender and geographical diversity. They are, after all, national broadcasters. The ultimate responsibility for appointments, as in all ministerial responsibility positions, remains with the minister.

The second element of this commitment is the staff-elected director position on the ABC board. It is the belief of this government that the reinstatement of a staff-elected director will further enhance the governance arrangements of the ABC board. The position of staff-elected director makes an important enhancement to the ABC’s independence by providing the board with a director who has a unique and important insight into ABC operations. Given their knowledge of the daily operations of the broadcaster, the staff-elected director may often be in the best position to critically examine the advice coming to the board from the ABC’s executive.

However, as with all other director positions, the primary responsibility of this role is to the organisation as a whole. It is not a matter of conflict between two roles at all. The basis of the legislation is to have a transparent and accountable ABC board. That is what it is at the heart of the provisions of this bill.

I would like to take the opportunity to celebrate the importance of the ABC and SBS as the national broadcasters in our culture and our community. An example has been watching the ABC and its activities in recent years as it has continued to adapt to, and change with, the modern media demands of the population and the technologies that are available to us. Take ABC NewsRadio, for example. You can listen live on over 60 frequencies as it reaches into the metropolitan, rural and regional areas of Australia and get up-to-date, professionally provided news. You can go to the ABC NewsRadio’s podcasts of parliament and question time. That gives you the ability to relive the exciting moments that we share together in this House.

We also get ABC NewsRadio Breakfast each weekday. That gives us a great summary of, and commentary on, what is going on in our nation. You can involve yourself in this analysis on the ABC’s online news and opinion site, The Drum, which, by its nature, is drumming up lots of business at the moment. The great thing about this, whether you agree or disagree with it, is that it is a means to engage directly with the affairs of the nation and to have your say. This is the same for Tune and Tweet #qt, which allows one to follow tweets of news headlines and updates, with audio links as well, from ABC Radio.

Those are just some of the services that the ABC, in its expanded role, is providing to the Australian people and the Australian
community. We are very grateful for those services. They are a good use of taxpayers’ money and a good return for it.

I would like to finish off my contribution by reinforcing the relevance to telecommunications of the government’s recent announcement about seeking to deal with the provision of digital television Australia-wide. This was reinforced yesterday by the Prime Minister in his answer to a question put by the member for Mallee, who shares with me and with other regional members concern that regional populations should be able to receive not just television signals per se but digital television now and into the future.

What has been announced on 5 January by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, the Hon. Stephen Conroy, is essentially that, for those people who at the moment receive terrestrial analog signals through community based translators, with the rollout of digital television the government is working with commercial operators, where possible and where appropriate, to roll out commercial services to those community based analog translators to convert to digital signals. I understand that the government is negotiating with some 100 of those community translators to try and start, through pilot projects, to roll this digital signal out. I understand that something like 247,000 households will be affected by this.

Where there are people who are unable to receive digital signals through commercial arrangements, the government will be funding a satellite service to provide all of the digital services that are available. The government will do that through (1) the provision of the satellite service itself and (2) the provision of a subsidy to households to enable them to receive the digital signals through the satellite service. The rollout of digital television is going on throughout Australia. We have now mandated the timetable and it is underway.

In my own electorate of Braddon, the geography of which is magnificent and the physical environment of which is fantastic, the topography has never been the most conducive to the transmission of television signals. It is up hill and down dale. If something is not in line of sight, we start to have transmission issues. The template that Minister Conroy has announced is, I believe, the most appropriate template to allow people in my region to be able to receive digital television into the future. The commercial channels, under their obligations, can and will go only so far, so I congratulate the minister on this. I, like many other regional members, will be monitoring this very carefully and seeking to assist our communities to get the digital rollout as soon as possible and as accurately as possible. Part and parcel of that is the reception of ABC and SBS.

That brings me back to this legislation, which I believe will make the boards of these organisations even more transparent, even more accountable and even more professional. We thank all those members who are currently serving on these boards and look forward to this legislation making their processes even more effective in the future.

Mr RAGUSE (Forde) (10.15 am)—I rise today to speak in support of the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. It has been an interesting debate and very emotive, and we can understand why. We have grown up with Aunty—the ABC—and with SBS, also part of our public broadcasting, as our friendly cousins. Many different points of view have been well covered in the debate today. But the reality is that there is a need for this legislation, especially as it relates to appointments to the boards.

SBS and the ABC, as I said, have been part of our culture for many years. We have
all grown up with the ABC. At different
times of our lives it has interested us in dif-
ferent ways. For us as members of parlia-
ment, the quality of news broadcasting and
the way that political issues are dealt with is
very, very important. So it is an honour for
me to be part of the Rudd government as we
ensure the ongoing security of the independ-
ence of the ABC and SBS.

It is interesting to note that this amend-
ment bill comes about as part of an election
commitment. I can understand the opposi-
tion’s concerns about a whole range of
things—that is what they are here to do, to
provide an alternative explanation. But this
was part of an election commitment. It was
something that we identified a long, long
time ago as needing rectification. The 2007
election allowed us to take that mandate for-
ward and present the amendments here to-
day.

Before I go on with some of my own
thoughts and considerations, I would like to
put on the record what the amendments in
this legislation concern. The National Broad-
casting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009
makes changes to the Australian Broadcast-
ing Act 1983, the ABC Act; and the Special
Broadcasting Service Corporation Act 1991,
the SBS Act. At a high level, these changes
implement merit based appointment proc-
cesses for the ABC and SBS boards and rein-
state the role of staff-elected director to the
ABC board. The merit based appointment
process for non-executive directors is pro-
posed to work in the following way. Vacan-
cies are to be advertised in at least national,
state and territory newspapers as well as on
the internet. Applications are to be assessed
by an independent nomination panel. This
assessment is to be made against selection
criteria, with additional criteria determined
by the minister if needed. A short list of rec-
commended candidates is to be prepared and
provided by the nomination panel to the min-
ister or the Prime Minister. The minister or
Prime Minister will select a candidate from
the short list and write to the Governor-
General recommending the appointment.

The mandatory criteria for appointment
are worth considering. These are:
- experience in connection with the provision
  of broadcasting services or in communica-
tions or management
- expertise in financial or technical matters,
  and/or
- cultural or other interests relevant to the
  oversight of a public organisation engaged in
  the provision of broadcasting services.

There is a range of people who are not eligi-
ble to fill these positions, and this has been
well covered by both sides of the House in
this debate. Some of the conditions are that:

- Current or former members of the Common-
  wealth Parliament, state and territory parliaments
  or legislative assemblies, and current or former
  senior political staff are not eligible for appoint-
  ment to the ABC or SBS Boards.

It seems this is part of the contentiousness
of these amendments. It is probably best to con-
sider what is occurring here. We understand
that the ABC and SBS are public broadcast-
ers—owned by the people of this country—
and we all, on both sides, understand the
need for them to be independent. What we
are arguing about with these appointments is
the perception that there could be interfer-
ence.

Viewing the ABC over many years, I have
seen some of the political issues that have
arisen around the public broadcaster. One of
these political issues has been whether board
appointments should include staff members
or not. The amendments of 2006 removed
the role of a staff-elected director of the
board. And I well remember, just prior to the
1996 election, when John Howard was in
opposition, some of the interviews with
Kerry O’Brien. There was certainly a distaste
by Howard about the interview style of Kerry O’Brien—to the point that Mr Howard refused to appear. In fact, when he became Prime Minister he refused to do interviews with Kerry O’Brien at all. I am not sure what that meant in the long term, but clearly there was a move later on to say that the independence of the ABC was somehow compromised and that we should appoint members of the board in a certain way. The reality is that it was perceptual. Good political argument in fair media will include all sides of politics when dealing with an issue. When you have both sides of the political fence arguing that there is some bias in the media, to some degree it probably means that the media is right on target.

One of the concerns that is emerging in terms of independence of the media is that journalism—and, as is well known, I have a media background—has moved in the last decade from good journalism to commentary. It is probably something we are all aware of at times. Media operates at two levels: there is the business of delivering the message, but there is also the message itself—and the content is very important. I have huge respect for media, as we all do. It is an important part of our society. That said, as commercial operations, certain media operations can become extreme in their views on both political sides at times, so we all experience at times a view that the media is unfair. That said, the ABC and SBS need to maintain independence. Simply the perception that the ABC or SBS might have some sort of bias could be compromising. Arguments put forward today about whether we should or should not have a staff-appointed member on the board are related to the view that in some way it compromises the quality or the independence of the ABC.

I believe that it probably goes more to an ideological perspective. I mentioned the former Prime Minister’s concern about the independence of the ABC and one particular journalist but it certainly goes a little bit further than that. We well understand the issues of waterside workers back in the nineties and the High Court ruling at the time that basically threw out the suggestions of the then Howard government about how the issues of waterside workers and the unions should be reviewed and renewed. That came back very strongly against the workers in this country with Work Choices. Work Choices was ideologically driven. On a business basis you can argue a whole lot of points but this comes back to the rights of individuals within their workplaces.

Back in the eighties the need to increase industrial democracy—democracy in the workplace—was known around the world. All sides of politics essentially understood the need to have more involvement by workers at different levels—whether it is people in management, people who are process workers, people involved in management buyouts or people who are considering a shareholding of an organisation or a business. In my own businesses I have always had staff who have had some financial interest in the business. It makes sense for a whole range of reasons, such as the expertise of the people who understand the business, but it is about industrial democracy. It is about people in the workplace not only having a say but also having a unique understanding and corporate knowledge that goes with their involvement in an organisation or business. To me, the mere fact that there is some opposition to having a staff-appointed member of the board goes totally against the importance of having some local or corporate knowledge involved in decision making.

Many members on the other side talked about members of parliament not being members of the board; clearly it is a matter of perception. It does not suggest for a minute that members of parliament do not have
the skills. Yes, ‘merit-based’ suggests that it would be open to all and sundry. The reality is that, as a public broadcaster and an independent news service, if there is any perception of bias that is a problem for the ABC and SBS.

It makes a lot of sense to me that in progressing staff appointments we do not include members of parliament or their staff as nominations for the board. It is not about whether we are capable of doing that particular job or not. Yes, there is a history of former members of parliament serving on boards, particularly on the ABC and SBS boards. This legislation came about because of an election commitment, as there was a perception that there was some political tampering. Whether there was or not, people in the community had that view and as the Labor government came into office we decided that we needed to do something about it—hence, this amendment bill that is here with us today.

This does formalise a certain structure and approach for how appointments are made. As an opposition, and now as a government, we had concerns that there was some adhocery in the way that boards were appointed. I am not suggesting for a minute that there was political bias in that but the adhocery did open it up to that sort of challenge and the perception that some things are not right.

A number of members on the other side talked about our involvement in the ABC and that somehow we are tampering or fiddling with it. Let us judge by actions, not by words. The former government had a particular view that there was some reason to remove staff-appointed members. Quentin Dempster, who was removed during that period of time, was understandably very harsh about that treatment because he no doubt felt that there were some aspersions on him about his activities. He said:

The current ABC board cannot be relied on to advocate the cause of independent public broadcasting. It is in an ideological and party-political bog.

Obviously he was quite angry when he said that, but the reality is that here was a man, who was well-respected in media circles, being aggravated. He was upset about his treatment and about there being some perception that he was doing the wrong thing. To me that clearly shows why we need to keep the ABC and the SBS very independent and make sure there is a perception that all things are correct and equal when we are dealing with these very important public broadcasters.

Aunty and her cousin—the ABC and the SBS—are very much part of our culture and it is important that we are all comfortable in the understanding that their organisation will continue to improve, as it has. Governments of different persuasions have, one way or another, supported these particular organisations as they have continued to grow and as the whole media approach to news broadcasting and other services has grown. The fact that the ABC is looking at a 24-hour news service, in competition with some of the commercial operators, is a good thing for media. It is also a good thing for people who are employed as journalists or other operatives within media organisations to know that they have the ability and the quality continuing on both the commercial and public sides.

The ABC and the SBS have been part of our communities and our upbringing in this country. The ABC pre-dates any of us in this House and when we look at it we see that it is a dynamic organisation, albeit publicly owned and of some major interest to all levels, including—as this debate proves—members of parliament. The fact that we are looking at putting back the way staff appointments are made and excluding certain members of our community—in this case,
former members of parliament—is not something that the opposition should get too upset about. It is for all us and we are making the point that it is an independent organisation.

In conclusion, I would like to summarise a number of the points. Australian public broadcasting has been and remains an institution of which we can be all proud. Australian governments, of whatever political flavour, should never use public broadcasting as a means to further their particular political agendas. These reforms ensure that the great ABC and SBS, our Aunty and our cousin, will deliver quality independent media for the future.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (10.29 am)—I, too, rise in support of the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. This bill will amend the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 and the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991 to introduce new board selection processes for the ABC and SBS. The measures in this bill will deliver on the Rudd government’s 2007 election promise to end political interference in appointments to the ABC board. This bill implements a new transparent and democratic board appointment process for both organisations and also restores the staff elected director to the ABC board. Currently, the ABC and SBS board members are appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the government of the day. Whilst the acts specify generic criteria against which candidates are assessed, there is no formal process for appointments and no transparency in relation to how candidates are selected. The new appointment process will involve an independent panel conducting a merit based selection process for non-executive directors to the ABC and SBS boards. The independent panel will then provide advice to the government on suitable appointments.

The guidelines for this new process were released in October 2008. Using this new transparent and independent selection process, in March 2009 four appointments were made: two each to the ABC and SBS from an outstanding field of over 300 applicants. Features of this new process include that the assessment of applicants’ claims will be undertaken by an independent nomination panel established at arm’s length from the government. Vacancies will be widely advertised—at a minimum, in the national press and/or in major state and territory newspapers and on the website of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. The assessment of candidates will be made against a core set of published selection criteria which may be supplemented by additional criteria where appropriate for specific positions—for example, to address particular skill gaps. The nomination panel will provide a report to the minister with a shortlist of at least three candidates for each vacant position. The minister will select a candidate from the shortlist and will write to the Governor-General recommending the appointment as required under the ABC and SBS acts.

In accordance with the government’s election commitment, the appointment of current or former politicians or senior political staff will be prohibited. I will speak a little bit more about that later on if time permits. Where the vacancy is that of the chair of the ABC board, the selection process would follow all aspects of the merit selection process as it applies to non-executive board appointments—with two exceptions. The Prime Minister would select the preferred candidate in consultation with the minister. The Prime Minister would then confer with cabinet and, once cabinet approval was granted, the Prime Minister would consult with the Leader of the Opposition before making a recommendation to the Governor-General. I believe
that entire process highlights both how transparent and how fair the process will be. It certainly highlights that it will not be a process that is in any way politically biased.

I take a moment to talk about the ABC and SBS and their significant contribution to the Australian community. The ABC was founded in 1929 as the Australian Broadcasting Company and subsequently became a state owned corporation in 1932 as the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The ABC has been at the forefront of media in Australia throughout its history, beginning with radio in 1932, television in 1956, colour television in 1975 and satellite broadcasting during the 1980s. The ABC was one of the first major media organisations to establish a strong new-media presence online in 1995. Today, the ABC operates 60 local radio stations across Australia, 51 of which are in regional Australia; four national radio networks, including NewsRadio, Radio National and the dedicated youth network Triple J; three digital radio networks; and the international service Radio Australia, which broadcasts Australian news and content in eight languages throughout the Asia-Pacific. The ABC currently operates three television channels, with plans recently announced for a fourth channel dedicated to business, politics and news. Online, the ABC is not only one of the most trusted and up-to-date news sites in the country; it has also been a world leader in new ways of delivering media content to viewers through its podcasting and mobile services.

The ABC plays an important role in the production and distribution of Australian content. Much of this content, whether via radio, film, television or online, is not material that would be produced by a commercial media organisation. It is only because the ABC chooses to tell these stories that they are able to be told. The ABC has shown a willingness to take risks and work in areas that other networks are reluctant to work within. We see this in shows such as *Landline*, for regional and rural Australians; *Message Stick*, for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Australians; and the inspirational *Choir of Hard Knocks*, about homeless Australians finding purpose through shared music. This risk-taking extends to the ABC’s willingness to work with new and emerging talent: journalists, performers, writers, directors and musicians. Many celebrated Australians, including Ray Martin, George Negus, Garry McDonald and, more recently, Chris Lilley and Missy Higgins, launched their careers because of the ABC. It is through the ABC that many Australians are able to get their start in television, music and media, and many go on to international success. The ABC is in many ways the voice of Australia both locally and internationally and plays an important role in the daily lives of many Australians.

I now turn to the important role SBS plays in Australian life. SBS was founded in 1978, incorporating existing radio stations that broadcast to multicultural communities in their own languages. SBS TV began transmissions in 1979. Today, SBS Radio broadcasts in 68 languages across all Australian states. Importantly, SBS has changed over time, reflecting changes in society. It began its broadcasts in languages such as Italian and Greek and then added new languages such as Vietnamese, Cantonese, Arabic and Somali as these communities arrived in Australia in greater numbers.

The SBS charter provided in the SBS Act sets out the principal functions of SBS and a number of duties it has to fulfil. We can see from the charter the vital role that SBS plays in the lives of approximately three million Australians who speak a language other than English in their homes. The electorate of Makin, which I represent, has many communities of non-English-speaking background
and I am very aware of just how important SBS is for migrants new to Australia. To have information and news available in your home language makes settling into a new country so much easier. There has been much said in recent years of Australia and its view of migrants and new arrivals. The fact that we are a country with a government funded multicultural broadcaster that broadcasts in 68 languages shows just what a welcoming country Australia is and our willingness to embrace and celebrate new cultures.

There is a final point I would make in respect of SBS. Like the ABC, SBS has shown a willingness to work with new talent in film and media. The greatest difficulty for young people wanting to work in film and television is getting an opportunity to pitch their ideas—getting that first start. Many of the major networks and studios are essentially closed shops that are only willing to discuss projects with established artists. SBS goes out of its way to be the opposite. It has many specific projects designed to give young filmmakers with no professional experience their first professional broadcast opportunity. Many of these projects are geared towards filmmakers from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The ABC and SBS play unique roles in the Australian cultural and media landscape. I believe both perform roles that could never be filled by a commercial media organisation. It is only through government broadcasters that we are able to broadcast to rural and regional Australia and across the Asia-Pacific, provide opportunities for Australian talent to have their work produced and distributed, allow many Australian communities with unique requirements to access radio, television and online media that suits their needs and continue to provide opportunities for young Australians—regardless of their background—who seek a career in the media, film and television industries and display a willingness to innovate by embracing new technologies and new ways of delivering news and media content to the community.

The ability of the ABC and SBS to impartially and effectively continue their important service is very much dependent on the appointment of a skilled and balanced board. In that regard I am pleased to see that this bill reinstates a staff elected director to the board. That is not a new practice but one that I believe other boards, both public and private, would benefit from. Staff members inevitably know what works, what does not and what improvements could be made, yet their expertise is all too often ignored by management.

The ABC and SBS networks serve an important role in democracy. In a country where our major media outlets are owned by private and public companies there always exists the ability of media owners to act in their own self-interest rather than objectively and impartially. Their influence over public policy can indeed be immense and I have no doubt that we could all cite many known examples of that. In Australia we have laws limiting media ownership—albeit that those laws were substantially watered down by the Howard government. We have those laws to prevent media monopolies which in turn can have an undue influence on the flow of information and news. It is an important underpinning principle of our democracy that we have diversity of ownership of Australian media outlets, so much so that, other than foreign investment laws, media ownership is the only area of private enterprise that I am aware of where limitations of ownership are prescribed in law. The Airports Act places limitations on the ownership of airports by aircraft carriers and the ACCC has powers relating to market competition but our media ownership laws are quite unique. They are quite unique for good reason—that is, because we want to ensure that they are fun-
damental to underpinning the principles of democracy in this country.

Over the years the ABC and SBS have generally been seen by Australian people as being fair and impartial in presenting issues. It is my assessment that both networks would have a very high level of credibility when presenting political and current affairs. That credibility and impartiality is very important to our democracy. That credibility begins with the boards that manage them.

I want to comment on the two issues that have been raised by the member for Casey when he earlier said that the opposition would be moving amendments to the question of a staff elected person to the board and also the question of whether a person who was a politician or worked in politics would be eligible to be appointed to the board later on. In respect of a staff elected person to the board I said earlier that a staff person has a lot to offer to any board, whether it is the ABC board, the SBS board or any board whatsoever wherever it may be, because there is no question in my mind that staff have an incredible insight into the operations of the organisation that they work within—an insight that would undoubtedly prove to be invaluable to the administration of that particular organisation.

I note that the member for Casey said that it could cause a conflict of interest with respect to that person working or being appointed to the board. I say to the member for Casey that there are many, many other examples where employees are appointed to either government boards or private boards, and there are many examples where in fact it is provided through legislation that employees, through their union, have an elected person on the board. Those people could also be accused of having a conflict of interest. The reality is that they are appointed to the boards because they bring with them a degree of expertise and experience that is useful and beneficial to the organisation, and it would be no less the case with a person who was appointed to the board from among the employees of the ABC.

In respect of the question of whether a person who has been a politician or worked in a political advisory capacity ought to be appointed to the board or not, can I say this: again I support the government’s position on this. I believe they should not. I pointed out earlier in my remarks that the ABC is unique in its structure—so much so that we have legislation limiting media ownership rules in this country, albeit that legislation was watered down by the Howard government. It is such an important principle that we as a nation have accepted that we need legislation to manage and govern media ownership. We do that to ensure the impartiality of media services in this country and the news and reports that they provide. To suggest that a person who has worked in politics in one form or another will change their political views, I believe, is a nonsense. We all know that they will not, or at least that they are very unlikely to. Therefore, in the interests of the nation and given the importance that we place on impartiality in this particular appointment, it is important that that provision be supported.

My view is that this particular bill picks up on a number of critical elements in terms of the whole process about appointing people to the boards—transparent processes which ultimately—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—Order! The member is entitled to be heard in silence.

Mr ZAPPIA—will ensure the best possible board structure for those services. It will be free of politics not only during the life of this government but when other governments
are elected in due course. Secondly, it ensures that the board will be free of political interference as well, and that is absolutely crucial and fundamental to the good running of the ABC board. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (10.46 am)—in reply—I am very pleased to have the opportunity to sum up on this important legislation before the parliament, and I thank honourable members for their contribution to the debate on the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. This bill fulfils two important and longstanding commitments by the Australian Labor Party which will lead to improved governance and enhanced long-term outcomes for our national broadcasters.

The national broadcasters—the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, or ABC, and the Special Broadcasting Service, or SBS—play an important and critical role in Australian life, and it is imperative that they perform their functions in an independent and impartial manner. This bill establishes a statutory merit based and transparent selection process for the appointment of non-executive directors to the ABC and SBS boards. Strong boards appointed through this robust and transparent process are in the best interests of the nation and of the broadcasters themselves.

The process established by this bill will give all Australians an opportunity to nominate for a place on the ABC or SBS board and all claims will be considered on their merit by an independent nomination panel. In addition, the reintroduction of the staff elected director to the ABC board will increase the quality of the advice to the board and deliver positive benefits to the ABC and indirectly to its audience. This is simply common sense. It is well known that the lack of due process has in the past resulted in long-running concerns that the ABC, and to a lesser extent SBS, board appointments have been politically motivated. There is also a perception in the community that perceived political appointments have diminished the level of expertise which is essential if the boards are to do their job of making decisions on the range of complex technological and financial issues facing the national broadcasters.

The ability of the national broadcasters to shape and influence public opinion is significant. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that the boards of the national broadcasters fulfil their statutory charters in a manner that is impartial and independent of the government of the day. To this end, this new statutory appointment process will ensure that appointments to the boards of the national broadcasters are merit based. The government is committed to ensuring the ABC and SBS boards have the best qualified and most experienced members to assist them to navigate the significant challenges they will face amid rapidly accelerating changes in the media landscape. This merit based selection process takes the politics out of the appointment process and puts the focus where it should be: on getting the best candidates for the boards. The legislation is also drafted to ensure that the nomination panel conducts its selection process at arm’s length from the government of the day.

The second change to be implemented by this bill is the reinstatement of a staff elected director on the ABC board. The previous government abolished this position. Its rationale for removing the position was to remove a perceived potential conflict between the statutory duties of the staff elected director to act in good faith and in the best interests of the ABC and the appointment of that director via election by ABC staff. The gov-
The government does not believe there is any inherent conflict of interest, and we made a commitment in the context of the 2007 election to restore the staff elected director position on the ABC board.

The staff elected director plays an important role in enhancing the ABC’s independence by providing the board with a unique and important insight into ABC operations. The staff elected director will often be the only individual with the expertise to question the advice coming to the board from the ABC’s executive. The staff elected director brings particular expertise to the board but is not elected for the purpose of representing ABC staff. This is comparable to the other directors, who likewise do not represent the communities in which they work.

All ABC directors, including the staff elected director, are obliged to act in the best interests of the corporation as a whole. In the government’s view there is no question about the constituency that any ABC director is accountable to. Their prime responsibility is to the best interests of the ABC. The measures in this bill deliver on the government’s election commitments to introduce a new merit based appointment process for the ABC and SBS boards and to restore the position of staff elected director on the ABC board. The measures will increase the transparency and democratic accountability of both the ABC and the SBS boards, will strengthen our national broadcasters and will assist in ensuring they continue to provide Australians with high-quality broadcasting services free from political interference. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr Anthony Smith (Casey) (10.54 am)—by leave—I move opposition amendments (2) and (3):

(2) Schedule 1, item 12, page 5 (lines 8 to 15), omit subsection (5A), substitute:

(5A) The following persons are not eligible for appointment as a Director referred to in paragraph (1)(b) or (c):

(a) a member of the Parliament of the Commonwealth, or a former member where it has been less than 18 months since the person left office;

(b) a member of the Parliament of a State, of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory or of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, or a former member where it has been less than 18 months since the person left office;

(c) a person who is a senior political staff member, or a former senior political staff member where it has been less than 18 months since the person left the position.

(3) Schedule 1, item 24, page 16 (lines 1 to 10), omit subsection (2A), substitute:

(5A) The following persons are not eligible for appointment as a non-executive Director referred to in paragraph 8(aa) or (b):

(a) a member of the Parliament of the Commonwealth, or a former member where it has been less than 18 months since the person left office;

(b) a member of the Parliament of a State, of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory or of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, or a former member where it has been less than 18 months since the person left office;

(c) a person who is a senior political staff member, or a former senior political staff member where it has
Opposition amendments (2) and (3) deal with the proposition in this bill with respect to former members of parliament and former senior staff being ineligible to be considered as directors of the ABC by the new merit process. As I said earlier in the debate, this is a short-sighted and hypocritical move. It was best summed up, by accident, by the speaker prior to the minister, the member for Makin, who said—and I think I have quoted him accurately from trying to read my untidy handwriting—‘It was wrong that anyone who had worked in politics in one form or another should be on the board.’ I have news for the member for Makin. This bill allows a lot of people who have worked in politics in one form or another to be considered for the board: any non-senior member of staff and any member of a political party—anyone who has not been a member of parliament or a senior staff member. That is the great, gigantic hole in this proposal for those opposite.

In conjuring up this cheap stunt the examples they have used are of people involved in the political process who have been previously appointed, who were not members of parliament and who were not former senior staff. The point we make is: former members of parliament down the track should at least be able to be considered. If they do not stack up, and if you believe in merit, the merit process will deal with that. Someone like—and I will not choose an example from my side of politics—Bob Carr, a former Premier of New South Wales who has had experience in many areas, cannot be considered down the track by a merit process, but a former federal or state secretary or director who has not been elected to a parliament anywhere or has not been a former senior staff member can be considered.

The opposition has put forward a sensible amendment with respect to both the ABC board and the SBS board that after 18 months those people should be able to be considered. We think this is sensible. The 18-month principle is a principle the government have adopted in their own ministerial code of conduct. We say: have a cooling-off period and then at least allow those people to be considered.

The other point we make is that this approach—like so many things of the current government, designed in an instant for a headline—is completely at odds with the Prime Minister’s approach on many other appointments. The Prime Minister has stood in this House and talked about former members of parliament and former ministers—including, former ministers from the previous government—being appointed by this government because on merit they ought to be able to serve in those jobs. What is the Prime Minister saying? Is he saying that, if someone has been a member of parliament, they are inherently biased but it does not matter in a diplomatic appointment and does not matter in any other area? But someone who has, in the words of the member for Makin, ‘worked in the political process in one form or another’ is not eligible. There are a lot of people who are still eligible in that category.

The opposition think that this is something the government, in the cool light of day, should reconsider. They have a chance to do so now. On this side of the House I fully expect they will not, but I would ask them to reflect on that in the period of time between this House dealing with this bill and the other place considering it in the coming weeks.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (10.58 am)—I rise to support the coalition on amendments (2) and (3). I am pleased that they have been separated from amendments (1) and (4),
which I do not support, in regard to trying to deny a staff elected director onto the board. This issue of singling out those who are involved in the political process, whether as members of parliament or as political staff, is unfair. I certainly do not covet a position with any ABC or SBS board. I do not think my arguments should be interpreted as attempts to have snouts in the trough. I can certainly see the reason why government is concerned about this issue of governments of the day appointing so-called mates.

However, I think that issue is addressed through a transparent, merit based process. That should weed out anyone who does not qualify on their own terms on their own CV for a directorship on either of those two boards. It is a transparent, merit based process that is the backbone of this legislation before the House today. To manipulate that process by denying any group of people, regardless of whether they are members of parliament—they might be farmers or they might be from a particular industry—and to distort that merit based process is lessening the opportunities that the ABC board and the SBS board have to be as strong as I would hope all members of this chamber would like.

I know the government is trying to send some sort of symbolic message, and I think you are doing that through, as I say, making it a transparent, merit based process. But I think that by denying a certain group of people—in this case it is members of parliament and senior staff—you are potentially doing damage to the future boards of both the ABC and SBS. As we all know, there are many people in this place, including staff, who have a whole range of skills. We are more than one-dimensional creatures, and some of those skills—post time in the political process—may be of value to this country in another form through one of those boards. If we are being truly transparent and all encompassing about our ABC and our SBS then all comers should be welcome.

As I said last night, my eight cents a day should be no more than anyone else in Australia’s eight cents a day but, importantly, it should be no less. I think that is what is happening with this legislation with regard to denying those who have been involved in the political process. It is lessening the value of our eight cents a day in the future ABC and SBS boards. I would like to think that all of us have an ownership of these two entities—the ABC and SBS organisations. We all have our one in 22 millionth of those two entities and that is, I hope, for those who are not involved in political processes as much as those who are.

It is unfortunate that the government has, for whatever reason, chosen to make this statement by using politicians and political staff as some sort of blunt instrument to try and make a symbolic point. I do not think that in the future this will necessarily lead to a better ABC and a better SBS board. I think the term ‘overshot’ is the one that has been used previously. I would ask the government to reconsider; this is actually quite a sensible amendment in that it brings this into line with the previous codes of conduct about ministerial behaviour and an 18-month cooling off period, then game on. We all get on with our lives once we have left this place, whether as a staffer or as a member of parliament. We should not be denied opportunities in the future because we have been involved in the political process and, vice versa, the boards of the ABC and SBS should not be denied the opportunity to use the skills of anyone who has previously been involved in the political process.

I support the coalition amendments. (Time expired)

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (11.04 am)—The government
does not support these amendments. The government has a view that a prohibition on current and former members of Australian parliaments and senior political staff is about strengthening the independence of the process and ensuring the process is as far removed from political interference as possible. On that basis, the government will not be supporting these amendments.

Question put:
That the amendments (Mr Anthony Smith's) be agreed to.

The House divided. [11.08 am]
(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. DS Vale)

Ayes............. 56
Noes............. 72
Majority......... 16

AYES
Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Briggs, J.E.
Broadbent, R. Chester, D.
Ciobo, S.M. Coulton, M.
Farmer, P.F. Fletcher, P.
Forrest, J.A. * Gash, J.
Georgiou, P. Haase, B.W.
Hartsuyker, L. Hawke, A.
Hawker, D.P.M. Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J. Katter, R.C.
Johnson, M.A. Laming, A.
Keenan, M. Macfarlane, J.E.
Ley, S.P. Markus, L.E.
Marino, N.B. * Mirabella, S.
May, M.A. MoyaIl, J.E.
Morrison, S.J. Oakeshott, R.J.M.
O’Dwyer, K Pyne, C.
Pearce, C.J. Robb, A.
Ramsey, R. Ruddock, P.M.
Robert, S.R. Scott, B.C.
Schultz, A. Simpkins, L.
Secker, P.D. Smith, A.D.H.
Sliper, P.N. Southcott, A.J.
Truss, W.E. Tuckey, C.W.
Turnbull, M. Washer, M.J.
Windsor, A.H.C. Wood, J.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.S.
Butler, M.C. Byrne, A.M.
Campbell, J. Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L. Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M. Combet, G.
D’Ath, Y.M. Danby, M.
Debus, B. Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J. Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P. Georginas, S.
George, J. Gibbons, S.W.
Gray, G. Grierson, S.J.
Hale, D.F. Hall, J.G. *
Hayes, C.P. * Jackson, S.M.
Kelly, M.J. Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B. McKew, M.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Murphy, J. Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K. Owens, J.
Parke, M. Perrett, G.D.
Pliibersek, T. Price, L.R.S.
Raguse, B.B. Rea, K.M.
Ripoll, B.F. Rishworth, A.L.
Saffin, J.A. Shorten, W.R.
Sidebottom, S. Snowden, W.E.
Sullivan, J. Swan, W.M.
Symon, M. Tanner, L.
Thomson, C. Thomson, K.J.
Trevor, C. Turnour, J.P.
Vamvakinou, M. Zappia, A.

PAIRS
Somlyay, A.M. Crean, S.F.
Hull, E.K. Irwin, J.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (11.14 am)—by leave—I move opposition amendments (1) and (4):

(1) Clause 2, page 2, table items 3 to 5, omit the table items.

(4) Schedule 2, page 21 (line 1) to page 23 (line 22), omit the Schedule.
I will not speak in detail on these amendments. I have outlined the reasons that the coalition are opposed to a reinstatement of the ABC staff elected director.

Question put.

The House divided. [11.16 am]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. DS Vale)

AYES

Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Briggs, J.E.
Broadbent, R. Chester, D.
Ciobo, S.M. Coulton, M.
Fletcher, P. Forrest, J.A. *
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A. Hawker, D.P.M.
Hunt, G.A. Irons, S.J.
Jensen, D. Johnson, M.A.
Katter, R.C. Keenan, M.
Laming, A. Ley, S.P.
Macfarlane, I.E. Marino, N.B. *
Macklin, J.L. May, M.A.
Markus, L.E. Mobbs, S.J.
Mirabella, S. Morris, S.J.
Moylan, I.E. O’Dwyer, K
Pearce, C.J. Pyne, C.
Ramsey, R. Robb, A.
Robert, S.R. Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A. Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N. Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J. Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E. Tuckey, C.W.
Turnbull, M. Washer, M.J.
Windsor, A.H.C. Wood, J.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.S.
Butler, M.C. Byrne, A.M.
Campbell, J. Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L. Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M. Combet, G.
D’Ath, Y.M. Danby, M.
Debus, B. Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J. Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P. Georganas, S.
George, J. Gibbons, S.W.
Gray, G. Grierson, S.J.
Hale, D.F. Hall, J.G. *
Hayes, C.P. Jackson, S.M.
Kelly, M.J. Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. Marles, R.D.
McClelland, R.B. McKew, M.
McMullen, R.F. Melham, D.
Murphy, J. Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K. Oakeshott, R.J.M.
Owens, J. Perrett, G.D.
Plibersek, T. Price, L.R.S.
Ripoll, B.F. Rishworth, A.L.
Saffin, J.A. Shorten, W.R.
Sidebottom, S. Snowdon, W.E.
Sullivan, J. Swan, W.M.
Symon, M. Tanner, L.
Thomson, C. Thomson, K.J.
Trevor, C. Turnour, J.P.
Vamvakopoulos, M. Zappia, A.

PAIRS

Somlyay, A.M. Crean, S.F.
Hull, K.E. Irwin, J.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

Original question put:

That the bill be agreed to.

The House divided. [11.20 am]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. DS Vale)

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.S.
Butler, M.C. Byrne, A.M.
Campbell, J. Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L. Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M. Combet, G.

CHAMBER

**NOES**


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Thursday, 4 February 2010

**CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME BILL 2010**

Cognate bills:

- **CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010**
- **AUSTRALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATORY AUTHORITY BILL 2010**
- **CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CHARGES—CUSTOMS) BILL 2010**
- **CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CHARGES—EXCISE) BILL 2010**
- **CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CHARGES—GENERAL) BILL 2010**
- **CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CPRS FUEL CREDITS) BILL 2010**
- **CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CPRS FUEL CREDITS) BILL 2010**

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**PAIRS**

- Crean, S.F. | Somlyay, A.M. | Irwin, J. | Hull, K.E. | * denotes teller

**Question agreed to.**

**Bill read a second time.**

**Third Reading**

Mr **ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (11.26 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

**Question agreed to.**

**Bill read a third time.**

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**CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME BILL 2010**
(CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010

EXCISE TARIFF AMENDMENT (CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME) BILL 2010

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME) BILL 2010

CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME AMENDMENT (HOUSEHOLD ASSISTANCE) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by Mr Combet:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (11.27 am)—The carbon pollution reduction scheme legislation, introduced into the House this week for a third time, does three things to the Australian public. Firstly, it establishes a tax on families of $1,100 per annum. That tax translates directly to an electricity tax which the Prime Minister, from the seat now occupied by the member for Maribyrnong today, conceded yesterday would not lead to a seven per cent electricity price rise, as he said on Tuesday, would not lead to an 11 or 12 per cent price rise, but would bring about a 19 per cent price rise. In the course of 24 hours the bill to Australian families, in electricity terms, went up almost threefold by the Prime Minister’s own words. We know this only because he was forced under questioning to reveal the fact that he had left out the second year of the price rises. Yesterday, he did not mention the third or the fourth or the fifth year of the electricity price rises. He dismissed the New South Wales government’s Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal estimates of well over 20 per cent of electricity price rises as if they did not exist, as if they were estimates just from some body.

Actually, it is an independent pricing and regulatory tribunal which set the price rises for New South Wales—not hypothetical; it set the price rises for New South Wales.

I turn to the second of the things which occur in this bill, which introduces this tax on Australian families. It is more than just the $1,100; it is a cost to the economy of a $114 billion tax between now and 2020. What does that mean? In its first year, it is $4½ billion. In its second year, it is $11½ million. Over its first four years, it is $40 billion of electricity taxing, of food and grocery taxing, of taxing of heating and cooling for pensioners. These are the costs to Australia. These are the costs to Australian families. They are not hypothetical; they are factored into the price rises.

There are some very simple questions for every member of the government today. Why does your bill need to compensate Australian families? Why does your bill need to compensate pensioners? Why does your bill need to compensate mums and dads? Why doesn’t your bill compensate 750,000 small businesses? There is only one answer to why there is a large-scale compensation package—which is nevertheless wildly inadequate—and that is that this bill being introduced into this House this week will drive up the price of electricity by a minimum of 19 per cent in the first two years—through the words of the Prime Minister, extracted through gritted teeth at this table only yesterday, having said seven per cent the day before. The Prime Minister was willing to say to the Australian people, ‘A seven per cent electricity price rise,’ on Tuesday and on Wednesday it is a 19 per cent price rise. On Thursday, he might perhaps acknowledge the 300 per cent over the coming years which the Queensland government has referred to or the 62 per cent which the IPART has referred to—of which the CPRS alone is well
over 20 per cent in terms of the addition to price rises.

That brings me to the third of the areas of punishment under this bill—and I will go through all of the areas in more detail. The third is the windfall to big business for doing nothing, for doing business as usual, for not cutting a single gram—not a tonne, not a hundred tonnes but a single gram—of CO2 emissions. This bill, unbeknown to the Australian public because the Prime Minister is silent on it, gives big business $40 billion straight from the pockets of pensioners, mums and dads, self-funded retirees and small businesses—$40 billion for business as usual—whereas, under the coalition’s approach of direct action to reduce emissions through real action, not a dollar goes to anybody who is not actually reducing emissions.

We have an incentives based scheme; they have a punishment scheme based on driving up electricity prices as high as possible to try to effect some change through the pressure on what is widely known to be a largely inelastic good. So it is based, at its heart, on a flawed economic assumption that, in order to change behaviour, you have to drive up the highest cost mechanism and hope that people’s behaviour will change. There are enormous costs to families, enormous costs to the economy and an enormous windfall to big business—$40 billion for business as usual coming straight from the pockets of mums and dads, pensioners, self-funded retirees, single parents, small businesses, farmers and others who are out there struggling away. These are the people who will pay for a $114 billion, great big $1,100 electricity tax on mums and dads all around Australia.

Then we see the extraordinary jobs impact of this bill. This is the fourth element of the bill. What do we see in terms of jobs? We see that job losses will occur in the Hunter Valley and in the Latrobe Valley and job losses in manufacturing all around Australia. And, if you are a small business operator, you are likely to see an extraordinary impact on your business.

That is what is real in the government’s policy. But let me go through the government’s policy in more detail before addressing some of their issues in relation to our policy and then going through the essential elements of a direct action policy, which is $3.2 billion as opposed to $40 billion, and how that will produce jobs, protect jobs and, above all else, achieve the same target as the government’s but at a dramatically lower cost to the economy and a radically lower cost to Australian mums and dads. We think direct action, irrespective of what people think about the great challenge of climate change, will have a real impact with real benefits for the environment.

We have a vision of improving our soils, with a once-in-a-century replenishment of soils, of making Australia a solar continent—of a solar sunrise fuelled with a million solar homes, over and above that which is in place, by the year 2020. That is an exciting vision and it engages people and it gives them an opportunity to be part of the solution rather than to be punished for simply opening the refrigerator door, to be punished for turning on their cooling in North Queensland or to be punished for turning on their heating—and, if you are a senior Australian in Cooma, Jindabyne, Launceston or Burnie in the dead of winter, that is what is going to occur. I want to make the point that we have two radically different visions: the lowest cost abatement model versus a model based on trying to change people’s behaviour through driving electricity prices through the ceiling.

Let me turn first to the issue of the cost to families in more detail. Mr Deputy Speaker Secker, in 2012-13 constituents in your elec-
torate and constituents around the country will be paying $1,100 per family. The government have disputed this figure. They have said, ‘How could it be that Australian households will pay $1,100 per family?’ The answer is very simple. The government’s own figures set out a permit revenue, a tax revenue, of $11½ billion for 2012-13 alone. That money is not coming from big business; that money is being funded through increased electricity prices, increased grocery prices and increased heating and cooling prices for mums and dads, pensioners and farmers around the country. That is factored into everything the government do. How do we know this? Because they recognise that there has to be a massive but inadequate compensation package. So, in other words, their whole scheme is predicated on increasing prices—and they acknowledge it through the fact that they have to compensate people.

Where do we get the $1100 figure from? It is not just us. Whether it was the Daily Telegraph in November on the splash front page ‘$1100 per family the cost of Mr Rudd’s ETS’, whether it was the work of the Brotherhood of St Lawrence or whether it has been confirmed by other organisations, it comes down to simple arithmetic. The ABS lists 8.7 million Australian families. You need to multiply 8.7 million by $1,100. Multiplying 8.7 million by $1,000 gives $8.7 billion. You then add another $900 million, let us call it, and that gives you $9.6 billion. We are still $2 billion short of making up Mr Rudd’s tax. We are assuming that that component will be met off the bottom line of business, but if business passes that through it will be more than $1,100 per family. So remember this: it is the 8.7 million Australian families who are the ones that have to make up the $11½ billion. We are giving Mr Rudd the benefit of the doubt. We are saying that they will only have to make up $9.6 billion and that business will cop the other $2 billion and not pass the costs through for that, but it is likely that it will be higher than $1,100 per family. That is a very important thing.

What does that then mean for electricity prices? Let us go to the detail. In the government’s own modelling, they have a seven per cent rise in the first year. So, when I asked the Prime Minister on Tuesday what the cost of electricity price rises would be to a dry cleaner over the course of his scheme, he said, ‘Seven per cent.’ We knew immediately that he had taken the lowest figure from the first year. It was deliberately misleading. It was an intentional and deliberate withholding of some of the information that was necessary. When the next day we asked, ‘What about the next year of the scheme?’ he knew the jig was up. He knew that he had been caught withholding information from this House, and so the Prime Minister was forced to concede, ‘Ah, yes, I said seven per cent in the first year but, okay, there is another 12 per cent electricity price rise in the second year.’

That is not the end of it. That is not the end of the electricity price rises. On this day and in this place the Prime Minister must make a statement setting out the electricity price rises forecast for Australian families, for Australian pensioners, for Australian farmers and for Australian small businesses not just for one year, not just for two years, but for the entire course of the scheme up to 2020. We know that, in the first three years alone, IPART, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales, predicts a rise of well over 20 per cent. That is for the first three years alone. What is the nine-year electricity cost, Prime Minister? That is the question we ask and we expect a statement in this House this day before the parliament rises or there will have been a derogation of duty. We are in a battle right now about being honest with the Australian public about the costs. I know, because for
the first time I see hangdog looks of shame on the faces of the members of the government that they know that their scheme requires massive compensation since it will drive up prices. They also know that that massive compensation is not acceptable and is not sufficient because you cannot take $40 billion out of the pockets of mums and dads in Australia, give it back to big business and expect those mums and dads to be better off. That is a problem.

Let us go to the question of pensioners. In November, Sky News Agenda asked the Treasurer, ‘Can you guarantee that no-one will be worse off under your scheme?’ His words were, ‘I can’t guarantee that no-one will be worse off.’ I repeat what the Treasurer of Australia said: ‘I can’t guarantee that no-one will be worse off.’ How can the Prime Minister guarantee to a single pensioner living in Cooma, living in Jindabyne, living in Burnie or living in Devonport that, if their electricity bill is higher than the compensation they receive, they will not be worse off?

This is the question for the Prime Minister of Australia in this House today: will you guarantee to up your compensation if any one single pensioner has a bill higher than the amount which you are returning to them? Will you guarantee to change your compensation for any pensioner who produces a bill higher than the amount of the average compensation which you will be giving to them? If you cannot guarantee that you will change your compensation package, then you have misled the Australian public in your interview today.

The Treasurer was honest when he spoke in November on Sky TV and made the point, ‘I cannot guarantee that no-one will be worse off.’ The Prime Minister today made a promise he can never keep and the test for the Prime Minister today is, firstly, whether he will release the full electricity cost of the scheme from now until 2020 for Australian families, pensioners, mums and dads, farmers and small businesses and, secondly, whether he will make it clear that if any one single pensioner produces an electricity bill in excess of the government’s compensation package he will meet the full cost of their electricity and grocery bills over and above the amount which he has indicated they will get. Either he cannot make that promise or he will have to change his compensation package.

I ask all Australians and all members of this House to focus on the simple question: why does this bill need a massive compensation package? Why would you need a compensation package if there were going to be no impact on prices? There will be a monumental impact on prices. It will be a rise of 19 per cent in electricity prices in the first two years and well over 20 per cent in the first three years, according to IPART—not us but an independent body attached to a state Labor government. It was dismissed by the Prime Minister yesterday as ‘just another organisation’. Unfortunately, it was an inconvenient organisation for him.

This brings me to the issue of the cost to the economy. I want to compare the two schemes. Our scheme sets up a cost of $3.2 billion over four years. The Labor Party scheme is about $40 billion over the first four years, and that is because it relies on driving up electricity prices to achieve a modest reduction in demand and, therefore, you have to cycle the money back—some from the pockets of mums and dads to big business and some back to the mums and dads who paid it in the first place, but not enough to cover the amount they have lost. You have created, as the Leader of the Oppo-
sition said, a great big tax, an enormous money-go-round and a massive increase in the costs facing individual pensioners, singles, self-funded retirees, mums and dads, farmers—anybody who has to pay for electricity, gas and groceries in Australia. That is the basis of what we are concerned about.

I also want to make a point about the windfall to business. The Prime Minister has been running around saying, ‘The opposition scheme is all about helping the big polluters.’ Let us be clear here: business in Australia gets not a dollar from the opposition for continuing with their ordinary practice; business under Labor’s scheme, under this bill, introduced in the dead of Tuesday night, gets $40 billion for failing to reduce emissions by a single gram. They do not have to reduce emissions by a single gram and they will get $40 billion in their pockets from the pockets of mums and dads. So let us set this up: we know that the bill itself, Mr Rudd’s scheme, is likely—and this is on the basis of research prepared by Access Economics for the state and territory governments—to cause 126,000 full-time job losses or forgone jobs. On the basis of Concept Economic’s work, there will be 23,510 fewer jobs in the mining industry by 2020. Frontier has identified 45,000 jobs lost in high-energy intensive industries. All this is from the folly of a system which would simply send this manufacturing offshore. That is the problem with the government’s system. That is the fundamental flaw in their approach.

The government has introduced overnight a dodgy document and has been hawking it around the press gallery. I caught Senator Wong’s staff hawking a confidential dodgy document around the press gallery. It is marked ‘DCC in confidence’. This is out in the press gallery. I will table this document, if the government will let me. Will you let me table this dodgy document that has been put around?

Mr Shorten—No.

Mr HUNT—The government has refused our attempt to table the dodgy document which they were caught red-handed giving to the press gallery of Australia. The government will not allow their dodgy document to be tabled. I call on the Prime Minister to table his dodgy document before question time is out, because they will not let us do it.

Having said that, what is in it? We warned that there would be a dodgy document. It is 1½ pages, with no modelling, with no assumptions, with words that are not finished and with sentences that are not finished. It is an embarrassment and a shame. We thought there might be 20 pages; we thought there might be something of substance. I have to say that I am disappointed; I thought they would do a better job. We spoke this morning with Frontier Economics, who are amazed at the way they were misrepresented by the Prime Minister yesterday.

Our policy—as opposed to what they produced—is capped, costed and credible. It is credible because we built our policy on a very simple proposition: least cost emissions reduction, paid for through a market system which provides for the government to purchase the lowest cost emissions rather than to rely on the highest cost emissions.

I want to take this opportunity to challenge Senator Wong to a debate in the Press Club next Wednesday lunchtime. Let’s do it. There is a free space in the Press Club. There is no reason not to do it. Senator Wong has gone missing in action, and is not defending the government’s policy, is not prosecuting our policy but is sending staff scuttling about the press gallery peddling dodgy documents marked ‘in confidence’. That is what is occurring. That is a government which is running from the truth.

So what will we be doing? Our proposal is very simple. After two years, Australians do
not understand this enormous, complex, new tax of $114 billion—$1,100 per family, 19 per cent over the first two years in terms of electricity costs. All they know is that it will hurt them, it will cost and it will be a windfall for speculators, derivatives traders, bonds traders—anybody who operates a financial system. So I say sorry to those guys; we are not out there to help you. But the government is. They are setting up a fantastic subprime on steroids.

After two days, Australians understand our scheme. Tony Abbott’s scheme is very simple. It is direct action to reduce our emissions. The elements are: one million solar homes by 2020; 20 million trees and the prospect of replacing the enormous overhead transmission lines and towers which cut through the heart of our cities with underground cabling—and paying for it by using the land which would be reclaimed for a mixture of parks and urban infill within our cities. Mums and dads and pensioners and seniors and singles and young people do not want these massive overhead powerlines right through the heart of their cities, right outside their backyards. We are offering that prospect. Last night the Energy Networks Association of Australia put out a release endorsing this vision. They are excited about the fact that we are looking at underground cabling. Firstly there is the electricity saving and secondly there is the prospect of prodigious change in the quality of life in our cities. So we offer quality of life, we offer a chance of doing it in a cheaper way and we offer a chance of meeting the same target but with a sense of majestic vision where each and every Australian can be part of that solution as opposed to each and every Australian being the victim of a massive new tax.

There is more, though, to what we are doing: $100 million for solar towns and solar schools; $50 million for the great vision of geothermal and tidal towns to use microprojects right around Australia in remote areas, and we have already had great support from people such as Dr Donald Payne for a project and a vision such as that. Over and above that, we have an emissions reduction fund which gives us the chance at a once in a century replenishment of our national soils. This vision at this moment in time is what Australian farmers need. It is about replenishing our national soils, increasing their productivity and capturing carbon in the process. It builds on the work identified by Professor Garnaut, Tim Flannery, the CSIRO, the Wentworth Group, Dr John White and many other people—including, incidentally, your own government agencies—who have identified soil carbon.

That is the vision and opportunity: we will make Australia more productive by providing incentives rather than making Australia less productive by providing a massive penalty for existence on Australian mums and dads. This is a seminal moment during the course of these three years. It is the moment where we have two choices for Australia: the government’s scheme of a massive tax on every Australian mum, dad and senior, or a direct action alternative to achieve the same outcome of a reduction of 140 million tonnes of emissions, a five per cent reduction on our 1990 targets, which is a positive thing.

But do not take our word that the million solar panels, the 20 million trees, the great vision of repairing the hearts of our cities and repairing our landscape is a good thing. Who are the supporters? The Minerals Council of Australia, the Australian Food and Grocery Council, the Australian Retailers Association, the National Farmers Federation and ACCI have all said that there is great interest, and in many cases they have come out with enormous support for the coalition’s scheme.
One of Australia’s most respected business writers, Alan Kohler, writing in the Business Spectator only yesterday, endorsed, embraced and put great faith in the coalition’s system. Add to that the work of Frontier Economics and the enormous support we have from mainstream Australians who for the first time understand that they can be part of the climate change solution. Irrespective of what you think of climate change, they can be part of improving our soils, our energy efficiency and the way Australia goes about cleaning up our oldest and least efficient power stations. It is a vision of participation in the future, rather than a vision of being a victim of a massive new tax from which they can never escape.

What we have is a choice. We have a government relying on a massive new tax of $114 billion, or $1,100 per family, and electricity price rises of 19 per cent over two years, according to the Prime Minister’s own words, while failing to address the subsequent years. These words were dragged out of him through gritted teeth yesterday after he said seven per cent the day before—almost a tripling of the price rise in 24 hours. Compare that system to the system of direct action that Tony Abbott has put forward. It will make real reductions through an emissions reduction fund which will reward only those people who make real savings, rather than the $40 billion picked from the pockets of mums and dads which will go, under Labor’s bill, only to the biggest businesses in Australia.

That is what is happening: the 750,000 small businesses will get nothing, mums and dads will pay $1,100 per year, and numerous other people will suffer. That is what will occur under the government’s system. We offer Australia a direct action alternative with real emissions reductions: a million solar homes by 2020, 20 million trees and the vision of cleaning up our cities, plus solar towns, solar schools, geothermal and tidal towns, urban forests and a re-greening of our cities. That is the choice facing Australia today and that is why we will be opposing this bill. (Time expired)

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (11.57 am)—The Leader of the Opposition’s statement that he thinks climate change is absolute crap and his previous remarks where he compared the Copenhagen climate change conference with the notorious Munich accord between Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler reveal the extraordinary shallowness of his preparation for high office. Not only has he deliberately confused the purpose of the climate change conference with political blackmail by a tyrant but also he has, by implication, slandered those who attended as either villains or fools. The participants were plainly neither, yet this smear evidently serves the purpose of Leader of the Opposition and his followers in their manipulation of the deluded climate change deniers within the ranks of the Liberal-National Party coalition.

On this point, last Saturday the Sydney Morning Herald reported the extraordinary story that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, when Minister for Education, Science and Training, had arranged for Tim Johnston, the author of the something-for-nothing Firepower fuel pill scheme, to have not one but two dinners with the then Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, to discuss—all things—climate change. The debate on climate change this week in the House has shown that the members of the former government were, and still are, happy to take advice from persons with absolutely no credentials in the field, yet when reputable scientists warn that action to reduce emissions is urgently required the Leader of the Opposition is among the first to attack any perceived error in the presentation of the data.
While the Leader of the Opposition only intends to use these issues to spread confusion and fear for his personal advantage, the evidence for the case to reduce greenhouse gas emissions grows. Contrary to the claims of the deniers, the governments of the world are no longer at the beginning of the debate about the science of global warming. They are not in the middle and undecided, as the Leader of the Opposition misleadingly contends, but at the end and in favour of action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions as rapidly as possible. I would like to quickly outline the way in which the science developed until the 1950s, at which time compelling evidence for the controlling effect of carbon dioxide on climate was firmly established by a long line of eminent independent scientists. Then I will summarise some of the necessary responses.

Following the fundamental advances in physics and chemistry in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, scientists first realised that atmospheric gases such as carbon dioxide cause a greenhouse effect that modifies the surface temperature of planetary bodies like the earth. For the benefit of those opposite and other deniers I digress briefly into some elementary physics that is the basis of the argument about global warming, not quantum mechanics—not Einstein’s special theory of relativity nor his general theory but basic undergraduate level physics. In 1990 the German physicist Max Planck produced a mathematical description of the law of nature by which all objects emit a mixture of electromagnetic radiation in proportions that depend on that object’s temperature. We perceive this radiation as wavelengths of infrared radiation known commonly as heat radiation or visible light, ultraviolet, microwaves, radio waves, X-rays and so forth. This law now known as Planck’s black body spectrum makes predictions that are in complete agreement with experimental results at all temperatures.

For instance—and this is the point—we can calculate using Planck’s formula, as can any undergraduate or accountant using a spreadsheet, that the sun with a surface temperature of 5,600 degrees Celsius has its brightest emission in the visible light part of the spectrum, while the earth with a mean surface temperature of about 13 degrees Celsius has its brightest emission in the infrared or heat radiation part of the spectrum. If the earth had no atmosphere or a very thin atmosphere like Mars, then the average surface temperature would be a chilly minus 70 degrees Celsius, yet it is plainly warmer. This is due to the greenhouse effect of atmospheric gases such as carbon dioxide that absorb some of the infrared radiation radiated by the earth and transfer the trapped heat back to the surface. This understanding, the result of measurements begun by the Frenchman Joseph Fourier in the 1820s, shows that changes in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide could affect global temperatures. As Fourier explained 170 years ago, energy in the form of visible light from the sun easily penetrates the atmosphere to reach the surface and it heats up. But this heat cannot so easily escape back into space. These initial investigations by Fourier were undertaken as part of an attempt to understand the processes that had led to the huge climate change that had produced the preceding ice ages, then a hotly debated topic among the scientists of the day.

In 1859, the English scientist John Tyndall conducted a series of measurements on the heat-trapping properties of atmospheric gases and showed that carbon dioxide, although only present in parts per 10,000, could effectively block the transmission of heat radiation through the atmosphere. Tyndall showed that just as visible light could pass through water many metres deep and be
blocked by a single sheet of dark paper, sunlight could pass through the atmosphere, equivalent to a mass of water up to 10 metres thick, while reradiated heat energy from the earth could be trapped by atmospheric carbon dioxide, currently equivalent to an opaque layer less than half a millimetre thick. In this way, a trace quantity of carbon dioxide changes the climate by altering the balance of energy that either passes through the atmosphere to space as heat radiation or is scattered back to the surface to produce global warming. This elementary explanation for the effect of carbon dioxide on climate was, as I have said, well understood before the turn of the 19th century.

In 1896, the Nobel Prize winning Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius, also investigating the origins of ice ages, calculated by hand that the effect of doubling the then concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide would be to increase average global temperatures by some five to six degrees Celsius. At the time, an average temperature a few degrees higher did not seem like a bad thing for the inhabitants of a cold northern country like Sweden. This complacent view persisted until the 1950s, along with the unsubstantiated opinion held by many non-scientific authorities that human activities could not, and were not, affecting global temperatures and that the atmosphere and oceans were a self-regulating system that would compensate for the effect of any carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere. This is a view evidently still held by the Leader of the Opposition more than 60 years later. Importantly, inaccurate early measurements that have been used to support this position appeared to show that the infrared absorption bands of water vapour and carbon dioxide overlapped, leading to the erroneous conclusion that any effect of changing carbon dioxide levels on global temperatures would have been swamped by atmospheric water vapour.

Following technical advances in World War II, the situation was completely changed by a series of measurements of the infrared properties of atmospheric gases that were funded by the United States military, more concerned about immediate weapons applications than future climate change. The more accurate postwar measurements demonstrated that, at the low pressures and temperatures found in the upper atmosphere, the infrared absorption bands of water vapour and carbon dioxide did not overlap strongly and the transmission of infrared radiation to space through the frigid upper atmosphere that holds little water vapour can be significantly affected by variations in carbon dioxide concentrations. This was a key discovery in understanding the details of the mechanism responsible for the trapping by atmospheric carbon dioxide of infrared radiation emitted by the earth.

Following that discovery, in 1956 the physicist Gilbert Plass, using the latest computer technology, calculated the transmission of infrared radiation across the infrared spectrum and layer by layer through the atmosphere and showed that a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels at that time could result in a surface temperature increase of three to four degrees Celsius. The work of Plass proved one central point: that it was no longer possible to use arguments based on previously inaccurate measurements of properties of the atmosphere in arguing against the effects of carbon dioxide on global warming.

Among other discredited arguments that had been invoked and are still regularly invoked by deniers was that such is the volume of air that human activity could not possibly be significantly adding to atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations and that, anyway, excess carbon dioxide would be quickly absorbed by the oceans. These fabrications were also demolished by other postwar dis-
coveries. In 1955 the eminent chemist Hans Suess measured the atmospheric concentration of the short-lived radioactive isotope carbon-14, which forms by cosmic ray bombardment of nitrogen in the atmosphere, to determine the ratio of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels to carbon dioxide already present in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide from fossil fuels contains no carbon-14 whereas carbon dioxide already present in the atmosphere contains a proportion of that radioactive isotope. Finding a decreasing proportion of carbon-14 in the atmosphere meant only one thing: that carbon dioxide already present was being diluted by carbon dioxide from fossil fuels. Within a decade isotope measurements confirmed that carbon dioxide from fossil fuels was rapidly accumulating in the atmosphere.

That increase was further explained at the time by the work of Roger Revelle from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, who showed that the chemistry of seawater returned dissolved carbon dioxide to the atmosphere before the slow circulation of the oceans could take the dissolved gas into the depths. Carbon dioxide was not then and is not now being removed from the atmosphere by dissolution in the oceans at a rate sufficient to reduce its accumulation in the atmosphere. Fifty years ago Roger Revelle wrote:

Human beings are now carrying out a large scale geophysical experiment of a kind that could not have happened in the past nor be reproduced in the future.

We are now starting to see some of the results of that global experiment played out in our country, yet 50 years after clear warnings were given about the consequences we still have deluded deniers in the opposition claiming that there is no evidence of any need for action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. All that has happened since the 1950s has been the accumulation of data that further reinforces these early measurements and warnings, and nothing has since been found that contradicts these findings.

I now wish to make some points about the changes that we must face in responding to this existential threat. As of December 2008, according to the Department of Climate Change, Australia's greenhouse gas emissions currently total around 576 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum. Listing the sources according to quantities, almost exactly 50 per cent or approximately 287 million tonnes is emitted by power stations, agriculture emits 16 per cent or 90 million tonnes, transport accounts for 14 per cent or 79 million tonnes, industrial processes emit five per cent or 28 million tonnes, and land use is responsible for 11 per cent or 63 million tonnes.

A target level of a 60 per cent reduction of Australian emissions by 2050 requires average cuts of the order of 8.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide or 1.5 per cent of current levels per annum even starting from 2008 levels. That is the reduction in the consumption by our country of approximately 2½ million tonnes of oil or 2½ million tonnes of coal each and every year up until 2050. At the very least, an end to the growth of emissions must be brought about rapidly. Now while some may say 'it can’t be done', and I would naturally include the opposition in this group, I have seen for myself the development of an Australian solar energy technology which could, if rapidly deployed, quickly reduce the emissions from coal fired power stations by more than 50 per cent, a major reduction from the largest single source.

Up until 2006, Professor David Mills and his group in the Department of Applied and Plasma Physics at the University of Sydney developed a low-cost solar thermal collector which can either be used to replace burning
coal in existing power stations or be used to construct new, stand-alone solar thermal power stations. Professor Mills explained to me that a solar thermal collector of no more than six square kilometres could displace approximately 60 per cent of the coal burned at Liddell, a power station that supplies approximately one-quarter of the baseload electrical power consumed in New South Wales. He also explained that, if all of the existing New South Wales coal fired power stations were repowered with solar thermal collectors operating only in daylight hours, then carbon dioxide emissions from those sources could be reduced by approximately 60 per cent. This figure could be even higher with the use of simple heat storage for night-time power generation.

Of course, this option is now less available in our country since the former Howard government’s overt hostility to renewable energy in general, and to Professor Mills’s developments in particular, forced Professor Mills and his team to emigrate to the United States, where they are now busily constructing solar thermal power stations as fast as they can design them.

The transport sector is the second largest source of carbon dioxide pollution in our country and emissions from that sector grew by approximately 20 per cent over the last decade under the destructive policies of the former Howard government. Not content with tearing up railway lines and scrapping hundreds of millions of dollars of valuable rolling stock, the Howard government deliberately introduced policies that increased the number and size of heavy vehicles on our roads while reducing the safety of an industry already notorious for some of the most dangerous working conditions in our country. Energy efficiency and emissions reduction were never considered by the previous government, as was evidenced by the refusal of the former transport minister and member for Gwydir, Mr John Anderson, to answer questions that I put to him regarding concerns about health hazards arising from increases in toxic emissions from heavy vehicles that were the consequence of the introduction of the GST.

In adopting policies that abandoned rail for road freight, that government rejected expert advice about the high risks of such a policy and demonstrated a complete contempt for the lives of truck drivers and the travelling public, increasingly forced to share roads with vehicles that were known to be unsafe. This is the legacy of the Howard government: a lethal high-emissions road freight industry and a wrecked and ramshackle railway network that requires billions of dollars of spending just to enable the railways to compete on level ground with the road freight operators. In addition, having adopted policies that have led to a situation where almost 90 per cent of freight movements are by road, the former government has left us in a highly vulnerable situation where any large-scale interruption to oil imports, for instance as the result of an attack by the major powers on Iranian nuclear weapons laboratories, would lead to serious economic disruption and perhaps even food shortages in the major cities.

The neglect of our rail network is evident in the fact that Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane remain connected by a single-track railway on 19th century alignments that lack modern signalling or electrification and that take up to 21 hours to carry consignments between Sydney and Melbourne and between Sydney and Brisbane. Transferring freight and passenger transport to the energy efficient railways is a practical means of rapidly reducing carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector because it is estimated that rail transport is at least four times as energy efficient as road transport and, if electrified, can be made entirely immune from problems
with oil supplies or emissions. If the electrical energy were to be drawn from renewable generators, the railways can be made emission-free and sustainable in the long term, something that is not possible with the existing high-emission road transport system increasingly dependent on oil.

Climate change deniers are currently making much political hype about the suffering of people in the Northern Hemisphere and in Europe, in particular claiming that the recent arctic conditions there are proof that global warming is not occurring. Were these deniers prepared to investigate the matter more carefully, they would discover that the intense cold in those parts of the world is actually just another example of the kind of climate change caused by global warming that has been predicted by climate scientists.

Xiangdong Zhang of the International Arctic Research Centre in Fairbanks, Alaska has found that patterns of atmospheric circulation in the Arctic are changing rapidly as the Arctic responds to global warming. In previous times cold arctic air has mostly remained over the Arctic, trapped by strong winds spinning around the pole. This winter, perhaps because of the effects of global warming, the vortex has weakened, allowing colder air to spread further south than usual. Overall, the Northern Hemisphere’s winter temperature may be no lower than in previous years but, because of changing wind patterns this year, the cold air is distributed differently, leading to the mistaken perception of global cooling that has been inferred from local weather events. In fact, the average surface temperature for the entire planet during January 2010 may turn out to be one of the warmest on record. While Europe freezes, Australia fries, and both of these weather events are strongly linked to the effects of global warming.

In concluding, the Rudd government is taking responsible action to mitigate the effects of climate change through the introduction of a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, which we are debating here today, shaped by the global scientific consensus that climate change is real. Climate change is real and it has been reiterated that Australia is one of the hottest and driest continents on earth, and we will be one of the hardest and fastest hit by its effects. I commend the bills to the House. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)—I thank the member for Lowe for a unique contribution.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (12.17 pm)—The nation expects its leaders to act on climate change, and act in good faith the coalition will—not act to export problems, not act to disadvantage our nation, not act to redistribute wealth amongst nations and not act to create an independent funding stream for any world bodies, but act against the risk that the climate is changing. As the coalition moves to act it does not do so as a single event or point in time. Indeed, the previous Howard government was one of the first to act. Notwithstanding the Kyoto protocol and notwithstanding the Howard government’s failure to sign it, we were one of only a few countries in the world that actually met our Kyoto targets, even though we had not signed the protocol. The question must be asked: what is more important—to achieve the ends of the protocol or to blindly sign it with no intention at all of achieving the targets?

The Howard government was one of the first governments in the world to establish an office of climate change when it first came into government, taking the issue seriously and beginning the process of action. Today the coalition continues to act, as we have done for the past 13 years, beginning with
the Howard government. Today I rise to lend a voice to the coalition to say that we will once again vote against the government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009 and cognate bills. This is the third time I have spoken against this legislation and the third time I will vote against it. Voting against this legislation does not mean that we are voting not to act. It simply means that we believe the government’s scheme is fatally and utterly flawed.

We believe the nation deserves a choice. The nation deserves to choose which approach they believe will actually achieve the ends we need. It is a choice between direct action, measures that are simple and understandable, or a great big tax on everything. The choice could not be more stark, and as we go to an election year that choice will be full and frank before the Australian people: direct action to achieve environmental aims and to address the risk of climate change or a big fat new tax.

The coalition’s direct action is an incentive based approach. It is affordable, it is practical and it has widespread benefits that will help reduce environmental degradation as well as carbon emissions. We believe that a sound policy in this space should encompass more than just dealing with the issue of the risk of climate change. It should also deal with the issues that have been plaguing our environment for some time. So I agree we need to act. If we move forward on a sensible path that leads to a cleaner environment, to cleaner air and to greater organic content of soils that produce greater yields; if we end up with a result of greener cities, of zero reliance on Middle Eastern oil, of greater use of renewables and of less reliance on fossil fuels; if we achieve all of this and in 30 years time for whatever reason the science of climate change is proved incorrect, we still will have produced an outstanding result for the people of this nation. I would rather we went for direct action with no regrets rather than a big fat tax on everything. The government’s proposed emissions trading scheme, reintroduced again, remains flawed in its current form. It will cost Australian jobs, it will cost Australian investment and it will simply export rather than reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

Indeed to see the hypocrisy of this government you need look no further than at the issue of the export of uranium to India. Right now India’s High Commissioner to Australia, Her Excellency Mrs Singh, is en route back to India because of the issues that this government has caused in our diplomatic relations. There is no question that India is seeking to address its climate change footprint. Currently three per cent of its energy is generated by nuclear power. The Indian government has a vision of 25 per cent of its energy being generated by nuclear power. Yet Australia will not sell uranium to India. Australia is holding back India from achieving some of its environmental outcomes and seeking to reduce its climate footprint on the planet. At the same time, the Prime Minister comes in here and lectures Australians about what should occur. Canada of course has picked up the slack with respect to exporting uranium to India. If this Prime Minister is serious about addressing climate change then he needs to be serious about looking at things like exporting uranium to India. We know that there is no sound reason not to do it apart from the pathetic public spat within the Labor Party itself.

Right now we are facing a range of price increases across the nation. If we look at the year to December 2009, the December quarter just passed, we see that in the last year the price of electricity has risen by 15.7 per cent across the nation, water and sewerage by 14 per cent, gas by eight per cent, running a motor vehicle by six per cent, and preschool and early school by 7.5 per cent. That is not a
bad record for a government that came in, in 2007, promising to reduce the cost of living. Of course, we are used to schemes like Fuelwatch being littered across the floor of the House, and GroceryWatch, another failed attempt to look at the issue of the rising cost of living. The ABS data that came out yesterday shows that in the last three months alone the cost of a basket of groceries in Sydney went up by $10. That is for the last three months alone. There is no evidence that this government has attempted or achieved any reduction in the cost of living or the price of groceries. Indeed all of the evidence points to these prices going up. Core inflation in the December quarter was 3.4 per cent, which is indicative perhaps of reckless and wilful spending.

So the question the Australian people face is which choice to go with—direct action on climate change or a great big new tax? It is a stark choice, and it is a choice which deserves attention here in the House of Representatives whilst we look at the government’s great big new tax bill. The coalition’s policy of direct action centres around an emissions reduction fund—a $2.5 billion fund through to the out years, starting in mid-2011 and going out for four years—to invest an annual amount of $1.2 billion to provide incentives for businesses to reach the target of reducing carbon emissions by five per cent by 2020. That is the target which has bipartisan support within the parliament. The coalition will look at tendering for projects that will reduce carbon emissions and that will deliver practical environmental benefits that all Australians understand and can enjoy. More importantly, the intent is not to result in price increases to consumers, not to result in job losses and not to proceed without fund assistance. The coalition is committed to keeping the emissions reduction fund at $1.2 billion out to 2020 to achieve that end state.

Likewise the coalition believe that we should actually be embracing the core parts of our nation like the sun and the soil. We have an opportunity for a once-in-a-generation replenishment of soils. Australia has over seven million square kilometres of land. Allan Yeoman, who wrote *Priority One*, believes we could pull out all of the carbon dioxide we have put into the atmosphere through increasing the level of organic material in our soil. He writes:

Soil humus and soil organic matter is mainly decomposed plant life and is 58% carbon. The only source of carbon life on the planet is the carbon dioxide in the air. We have to turn atmospheric carbon dioxide into humus as cheaply and as efficiently as possible. We are then recreating soil fertility, a process that has been happening for years. We just help the process instead of hindering it.

He continues:

It is simple and easy to increase the organic matter content of soil and so sequestrate carbon dioxide from the air. Our world’s agricultural land areas are more than ample to return atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to normal. We have to raise the organic matter content of the world’s soil we cultivate and manage by 1.6% and the greenhouse problems now destabilising world climates and weather systems will vanish.

He also writes that, if just the US grain belt somehow managed throughout the next decade to recreate deep soil with a 20 per cent organic matter content, the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere of the entire world would be returned to a safe pre-industrial era level. He is a world-leading expert on soil carbon, on keyline farming and on the use of equipment and ploughs for keyline tillage. He makes it very clear that improving soil carbon increases farm productivity, increases water efficiency and, more importantly, is fundamental to sequester carbon from the atmosphere. We have a once-in-a-century opportunity right now to invest time, money and technology in improving the organic...
content of our soils—to replenish the organic matter in our soils, to increase the humus content in our soils and thus sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

We also have an opportunity to use one of our other great endowments: the sun. We believe the coalition’s policy can open up a new ‘solar sunrise’ for our great nation. We have a vision of a million solar panels on roofs across the country—one million by 2020 with either solar power or solar hot water. To achieve that we will look at providing an incentive to people. Rather than walking around with a mighty big stick to punish the nation through a great big new tax we will actually provide an extra $1,000 rebate on top of what already exists to encourage Australians to be part of the solution, to empower Australians to look after their environment and to answer the great question that Australians ask: what can I do? Australians can do a lot, and providing incentives to put solar panels on roofs will do an enormous amount.

We will look at solar towns and solar schools initiatives to create a competitive tendering process for towns and non-capital cities to access direct solar energy. We will look at geothermal and tidal towns, again accessing $50 million from the geothermal and tidal towns initiative to support additional renewable energy opportunities. We know Australian towns and Australian people are inventive—they are creative. They have built their towns and sustained them through some of the most dreadful climatic conditions in our nation’s history, in pre- and post-industrial times. We know that Australians have the ingenuity, the creativity, the wherewithal and the courage to find solutions to these problems. We will also be looking at a study of high-voltage underground cabling to put cables under the ground and reuse the land underneath those high-voltage powerlines for trees and other things.

Importantly, we believe in green corridors and urban forests. We will facilitate the planting of a minimum of 20 million trees by 2020, mobilising Tony Abbott’s green army to get trees planted. But this is a minimum. I can envisage a nation empowered by direct action, a nation that can answer that great question: what can I do? I can put a solar panel on a roof. I can look at using low-voltage lights. I can turn off TVs at the power point. I can use low-water appliances. And I can get out there and plant a tree or two for every member of my family. Imagine if a nation of 21 million people decided to plant a tree or two trees for each person, families taking responsibility for their backyards. This is what the coalition’s direct action is all about—not only addressing the risk of climate change but also providing incentives for great environmental outcomes at exactly the same time. We believe Australians have the capacity, the courage and the wherewithal to find solutions to these problems. We will also be looking at a study of high-voltage underground cabling to put cables under the ground and reuse the land underneath those high-voltage powerlines for trees and other things.

We do not believe in a big government approach. We do not believe that government is the answer to all of our questions. As opposed to Mr Rudd, we do not believe that government should be at the centre of the economy. We believe that individual people within individual homes in their communities, rising up to take individual responsibility in concert with assistance from government can make the difference we need. We have a stark choice this year: direct action to address the risk of climate change and to achieve environmental outcomes versus a great big new tax. Therefore we will be voting against the bill. It is clearly not supportable. It is not in the best interests of the nation. I look forward to our nation rising up to understand and to accept that direct action is the way forward.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (12.33 pm)—I speak in support of the Carbon Pollution Reduction
Scheme Bill 2010 and cognate bills, bills that are necessary to put in place a legal and regulatory framework around the government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme—a scheme that in my analysis is based on three key elements. The first one is that big polluters pay, and we understand that. The second one is that low- and middle-income families right across Australia will be looked after by the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme fund and by having the big polluters pay. The third key element is that a limit will be put on harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

In his second reading speech, the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change articulated the five foundation principles that give strength to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the legislative and regulatory framework. I would like to restate the principles for the record. First, the scheme reflects the scientific consensus accepted by governments around the world that climate change is real, it is happening now and it will inflict severe costs on this country. Second, the government’s target for emissions reduction is both responsible and achievable and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the best mechanism to achieve those targets. Third, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the lowest cost way to reduce emissions for Australian households. Fourth, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the most globally responsible approach to the threat of climate change. It ensures Australia meets its emission reduction targets. Fifth, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme reflects a consistent policy of the government that formed a key element of our 2007 election platform, which was supported by the Australian people.

I would like to turn to those five principles and make a comment. There is scientific consensus despite some of the pseudoscience and innuendo being peddled about that at the moment. There is a clear scientific consensus. We only have to read what the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, our own respected and well-regarded institutions, have to say about the science and climate change. That is who we are listening to and that is who we should be listening to. It does not mean that we do not question—that is our job as elected members of parliament and representatives of our communities. We have to question, but we also have to recognise that there is good science, and we as responsible parliamentarians and policymakers have to act on that. That is what the Rudd government is doing.

It is very clear in reading the literature and the Garnaut report that if we do not act, and if we do not act sooner rather than later, the cost that the Australian community, households and people will have to bear will be more and it will be more extreme. That is why responsible action is needed now and that is why the government is taking responsible and decisive action.

The second of the five points is that the government’s target for emissions reductions is both responsible and achievable and that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the best mechanism to achieve those targets. Yes, there is a debate about it. In my seat of Page there are some people who say that they want 350 parts per million and not 450 parts per million, and I understand where they are coming from with that. They want to reduce emissions as quickly as possible to the lowest level possible. But, when introducing a major economic reform which has to protect both the economy and the environment at the same time to protect jobs but lead us to a low-emissions future, as the government is, we have to have a responsible and achievable target. That is what the government is committed to.
The third point is that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the lowest cost way to reduce emissions. That is what this is about; it is about reducing emissions. It is quite simple. People say it is complex; they can dress it up in what they like but it is really very simple. We are emitting too much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere. It is causing problems—it is causing the climate change that we talk about. We know that climate change is a naturally occurring phenomenon, that the impacts of it can cause damage to our environment and that it has been accelerated exponentially by human activity and by industry. Again, that is all in the science. But this scheme is the lowest cost way to reduce emissions. It means the big polluters pay and the households do not pay. The households can be involved in doing their bit, and they are, and there are other measures to help bring emissions down.

The fourth point is that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the most globally responsible approach to the threat of climate change. Yes, we might be a great big island and a continent, but we are not in this alone. We cannot quarantine Australia from the rest of the world in this debate. We do have to work with other nations to try to encourage them to bring their emissions down. That is why it is important, at that level, to be part of the international debate and work together. One of the things that I saw come out of Copenhagen—and it was a big thing that people will do in a variety of ways—was a commitment to keep the rise in temperature to under two degrees. It was important that there was that commitment. Yes, it is always better if that is in a legislative commitment and is in some sort of treaty, but those nations committed to it and it is a positive way forward.

Fifth, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme reflects a consistent policy of the government that formed a key element of our election platform. That is absolutely correct. There is nothing new about it; it was out there in 2007 and it was something about which the community said: ‘Yes, we want you to do it. We want you to take this action on climate change.’ That was important.

The Leader of the Opposition said, first of all, that climate change is ‘absolute crap’, but then he released a policy on climate change. You cannot have it both ways. It is either absolute crap, meaning that you do not believe in climate change, or you release a policy on it. That is confusing; it confuses me and I am sure it confuses the community, including the community in Page, where I live. ‘Absolute crap but, yes, we’ve got a policy on it.’ When you look at the policy, there are clearly three fundamental flaws in the policy, apart from the fact of not believing in it. First, the coalition policy slugs taxpayers instead of big polluters. I cannot see how that is popular. One of my constituents sent me an email about that last night. He said, ‘Janelle, that is the only question.' When you put it to the community that big polluters will not pay but taxpayers will, he said, ‘I think the proof is in the pudding.’ It is there and it is answered. People can see that they get it. That is the first flaw.

Second, it is unfunded, meaning that there will be higher taxes. It is totally unfunded and it is not costed. I heard the shadow minister for finance talking about some ways in which it could be funded, and they really were within the realms of fantasy. Senator Joyce spoke about the way it could be funded. He was talking about the Henry tax review. It is a review. He was saying that it could be funded out of that. I do not know how anything could be funded out of a review. It is a document—it is paper. How could you fund it? It is not a budget; it is a review. There were a few other gems as well but I do not want to waste my time on them. The third fundamental flaw in the policy is
that it does not require anything of the big polluters, so there will be no lowering of emissions. I just do not see how it can work.

The 2007 consensus of the Australian public was that climate change is a critical issue and it is one that the government has to tackle. We are in 2010 and the consensus now of the Australian public is that climate change is still a critical issue that the government has to tackle. This is despite the reckless and irresponsible fear and smear campaign that is run by the coalition. But it is worse than that, because a lot of it is based on lies, lies and more lies. I have to ask: how could a mob that presents itself as an alternative government have a leader who says climate change is ‘absolute crap’ and then produces a policy on it? How can they say they are credible on this? The Leader of the Opposition truly is not fair dinkum and he is being duplicitous and dishonest with the Australian public.

But I know that the Australian public wants us to take action, and the Rudd government is taking action on climate change. That is exactly what the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is about. The federal Labor Party in the 2007 election went to the people with a 10-point plan to tackle climate change and that has been implemented since we have been in government. There are also some extras that came with the stimulus: the insulation package, for a start, with 2.3 million homes across Australia, many of them in my electorate of Page, being insulated. That is a great initiative and I have heard the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, say that that is equivalent to taking about one million cars off the road in terms of what it means for lowering emissions.

But there are more initiatives. There are actually about 80 initiatives that the government has taken to tackle climate change and that will lead us into a lower emissions future. I will speak about just a few of them: there is the Advanced Electricity Storage Technologies program; Australia’s Farming Future, which I will come back to; the Australian Carbon Trust; the Australian Centre for Renewable Energy; the Australian Greenhouse Emissions Information System; the Bilateral Climate Change Partnership Program; the enhancement of the Bureau of Meteorology’s capacity to monitor and deal with climate change; the Carbon Capture and Storage Flagships Program; and the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum. Just on the latter issue, at Southern Cross University in my area there is a lot of work being done about capturing carbon into the soil and plants—not just soil, but into plant stones. The member for New England and I jointly held a forum on this particular issue at which we had farming and industry leaders present. Other initiatives include Caring for our Coasts, the Centre for Australian Weather and Climate Research, the Clean Business Australia initiative and the Clean Energy Initiative. There will be a Climate Change Action Fund and there is a Climate Change Adaptation Program. These are just some of the 80 initiatives. Some of them are being implemented now and some of them will be implemented as part of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that we are discussing today.

I said I would come back to farming and I now do so. The Australia’s Farming Future initiative comprises a number of elements: there is the Climate Change Research Program providing funding for research projects and on-farm demonstration activities; there is FarmReady, helping industry and primary producers develop skills and strategies to help them deal with the impacts of climate change; and there is the Climate Change Adjustment Program to assist farmers who are facing financial difficulty in managing the
impacts of climate change. There is farm business analysis and financial assessments, professional advice and training—which is individually tailored to the particular farmer—and transitional income support. There are also community networks and capacity building activities. So it addresses lots of issues around farmers.

I just want to say one thing about farming that is really important, because farmers are a big part of the thinking and the policy initiative of the government in the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. When you have a look at the initiatives, and when you look at the government’s policy and at the coalition’s policy, it is clear that farmers will get less for the actions that they take on their farm under the coalition’s policy than they will under the government’s policy. In fact, they will get three or four times less. Also, with the coalition policy, the emissions will be about 13 per cent higher. It will not be lower. So I don’t see how this sort of mythical figure of five per cent that they are talking about will be reached in any capacity.

I would like to turn to the economic credentials of the government and then look at the economic credentials of the coalition, and to set that against the issue of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. I think it will be very clearly seen who is to be trusted in this area. The Rudd government has performed superbly in the face of the worst global financial crisis since the Depression. The world went into recession, although it seems at times like the coalition just conveniently ignores that fact. We, Australia, did not, and that was not good luck or happenstance; it was good policy and good management on the part of the Rudd government. I would particularly like to acknowledge the team: Kevin Rudd, Wayne Swan, Julia Gillard and Lindsay Tanner, or, as I should say, the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. That is big. Can you imagine where we would be today if the Prime Minister had not ‘gone early and gone hard’, as he put it, and ‘gone households’? That saved us. It saved well over 200,000 jobs. It saved our local regional economies. In areas like mine it saved some small businesses. I know we are not out of the woods yet but we are not in recession. The jobs were saved, small businesses protected and households looked after at the same time as the budget delivered tax cuts to working families.

The coalition, on the other hand, voted against every stimulus measure that has kept us out of recession and has saved jobs and small businesses. If we had followed the economic policies of the coalition, we would be down the drain, and it is no different with the coalition policy on climate change. It is economically irresponsible and reckless. It will slug taxpayers, not big polluters. It is unfunded. It does not limit greenhouse gas emissions. It will see a rise in greenhouse gas emissions of 13 per cent. It will give less to farmers. It is committing us to being run over by our neighbours, by some of our important trading partners, and it will give less to farmers for the actions that they want to take.

The shadow minister for finance, Senator Joyce, really has lost the plot on this. I reiterate that he said that they would fund it from the Henry tax review. It is just astounding that someone in that position could say that. Whereas, if you look at the government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, you will see that it is funded, it is economically responsible and it is a major economic reform that will protect both our economy and our environment. It will lead us into the future that we need to be led into. But it is not a future that we can say is five or 10 years out there down the road; it is here now, and that is why we have to take that action now. This Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme of the Rudd government is the one that will do
that, protecting our economy and protecting our environment.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (12.53 pm)—I describe myself not as a sceptic but as an ‘anti’. When I say that, I do not say it lightly. I would like to think that every decision I make and position I espouse in this place is backed up by very extensive research—and I will go into that in a moment. I have tried to find a formula of words. If you were to cover your house with chicken wire and then say, ‘My house will now be warm in winter,’ or, ‘It will be cool in summer,’ how ridiculous that would be. Do you think chicken wire is going to make any difference to the heat of your house? Of course it is not. And that is 400 parts per million. You do not have to be a genius here to figure out that that is the equivalent of putting chicken wire over your house. I do not care if I am the only person in the place saying this—it would not be the first time—but I know who is going to be proved accurate in the long run.

The leading proponent of global warming—the leading scientist—in Great Britain let the cat out of the bag when his papers got into the public arena. He said that it was a shame that an Australian died because he was one of the few people who was working on proving the link between global warming and CO2. Even if you say that the world is warming—and the jury is probably out on that too—then you have to prove why. As I have said previously in this place, if a photon is being reflected from the surface of the earth, the idea that it is going to hit one of those 400 parts per million and bounce back to earth is fairly extraordinary. I have thrown a lot of stones in my time—literally, not metaphorically—and I have never noticed one of them coming back to me. If you throw them at a rock or a tree they will be deflected, but they will be deflected forward not backwards. On the odd occasion they might come back but that would be very rare indeed. There is a deflection but it goes in the same direction.

Obviously I am oversimplifying. When I come to this place I do not want to be saying things that are not fully and substantially researched. There is a problem that arises in the oceans—and I pay great tribute to Dr Katharina Fabricius, at the Institute of Marine Science, which is one of very few intellectual institutions in Australia that has maintained its integrity. I wish I could say the same thing about CSIRO. It has been a great tragedy for Australia that that organisation has impugned its intellectual integrity on a number of occasions now. The Institute of Marine Science, very much to its credit, has maintained—to quote one of the leading scientists in this field, Katharina Fabricius—that, if we put large amounts of CO2 into the atmosphere, it will be absorbed into the ocean proportionately. This tends to make the ocean acidic, which tends to create problems for calcium carbonate—that is, for bivalves, which are probably the lowest on the food chain in the oceans.

So there is a much more serious problem that can arise, a much more immediate problem. I am not saying that the problem is there at the present moment. They carried out tests on about 24 creatures of the sea, bubbled CO2 through the salt water and found that about 21 of them decreased their growth and three increased their growth. I thought: ‘Yes, they’ve proved their point scientifically. This is not like global warming; this is something that has very hard science behind it.’ A person such as me who is not a sceptic but an ‘anti’ can say, ‘Yes, I think we should take a bit of a pull on the reins here.’

Having said that, the coalition has come forward—and I praise the Leader of the Opposition for his phrase ‘direct action’. He said, ‘We’re into direct action; we’re going to do physical things that will answer this
Wilson Tuckey has said that on many occasions in this place and has been eminently sensible in this area.

The honourable member for Leichhardt is here, and he will back me up when I say that in Northern Australia we are wonderfully endowed with water. We are wonderfully endowed with sunshine. We can provide renewable energy to you in spades. Having praised the Leader of the Opposition for his movement towards direct action rather than the macro approach being advocated by the government, I say that, in sharp contrast, it is the government that has gone into the specifics and has gone a long way to delivering. In this case the cheque has not been in the mail; we have got a lot of commitment but we have not seen the colour of the government’s money yet.

We praise the honourable Minister for Resources and Energy, Mr Ferguson, for the wonderful work that he has done in advocating the connection of the Pilbara and Olympic Dam. But it is vitally important that in the richest mineral province on earth, the north-west mineral province, which has 500 million tonnes of iron ore, none of it has been touched at all, and we have not even looked for it—but we know there are 500 million tonnes out there.

It has four per cent of the world’s known uranium reserves—none of it touched; it is completely untapped. The biggest vanadium reserves in the world are at Julia Creek. It, of course, is famous because it is the biggest copper, silver, lead and zinc province on Earth, with some of the biggest mines on Earth, such as Mount Isa, operating in the area. Cannington was for a long time the most profitable mine in the stable of BHP, the biggest mining company in the world. It was the most profitable mine and—please, God—when they double production it will be again. So this is the richest mineral province on Earth. We have 24 phosphate deposits in the world; four of the 24 are in north-west Queensland. Only one of those has been touched.

To tap that wonderful resource we need energy. We need cheap power. I have to say this in harsh judgment upon the government. Please, Mr Government of Australia—and Mr Opposition of Australia, because the other side has been just as bad when they have been in government—understand that all you sell to the rest of the world is coal, aluminium and, to a lesser extent, iron ore. Coal and aluminium comprise over 30 per cent of what you sell to the rest of the world. All of Australia’s production put together does not amount to coal and aluminium. And what is aluminium? Aluminium is congealed electricity. Where does electricity come from? Electricity comes from coal. And if you say that electricity should not come from coal, God help you, because you will not have an aluminium industry.

Let me be very specific. I was minister for mines and energy in Queensland—and, if I say so myself, a very successful one. In fact, my department won the science prize for Australia for our solar energy in the Torres Straits. It was overturned by an incoming socialist government, I might add, but we will leave that out of the way!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—The honourable member should address the bill before the parliament.

Mr KATTER—Yes, and in addressing the bill you must understand that if you increase the price of electricity you shut down the aluminium industry. The price of coal is $38 a megawatt. The price of nuclear generated power is $60 a megawatt. If you want to go to renewables you are talking about $100-plus. So forget about our aluminium industry. Also forget about your mineral-processing industry; a very large proportion of our cop-
per, silver, lead and zinc is processed in Australia, and it will be completely non-competitive. In fairness to the government I have to say they have acknowledged that and excluded these industries, but there are grave dangers that that policy can be switched back. I have watched the work of Mr Rudd over many, many years, both in Queensland and now down here. He is very sensible. The bigger picture has been his history, and we hope it remains so. But who knows what happens in a change of leadership or a change of government? All I can say is that if the government or the opposition back off on that principle then God help Australia, because 30 to 40 per cent of our income depends upon cheap electricity, and that equals coal.

Having said all of those things, we give the government very great praise for their national energy grid concept. The first project there is to take power from the national grid out to the great mineral province of north-west Queensland, the richest mineral province on Earth by a fair margin. We have a very old power station. It is 50 years old and has tiny units. It is very outdated. It has to operate on gas which has to be brought from Surat, 2,000 kilometres away. It is enormously expensive, and we cannot keep operating like that, so we are very appreciative of the actions of the federal government in stating that they are going to move into this national energy grid. The honourable member for O'Connor, Mr Tuckey, has advocated that national grid on many occasions, and I think it only fair that he pay some tribute to the current government for the grid which he failed to get out of his government.

Let me move now to the transmission line that will take the power. The north Australia clean energy corridor is proposed by Minister Ferguson, the Treasurer, Minister Burke and Minister Albanese, and I must emphasise that the government needs to act if it is to claim credit for it. To date they have talked, and that is excellent—we thank them most sincerely—but there has to be action from the government on this clean energy corridor. When I say, ‘It is not a transmission line now; it is a clean energy corridor,’ it is because a wonderful company called PhytoFuel has come to the magnificent conclusion. God bless them, that there are six million hectares of dirty prickly acacia tree infestation that has wiped out our native flora and fauna. They are going to take those prickly trees and burn them. They are going to create electricity out of the steam they generate from burning them and they are going to replace them with biofuel trees. What a wonderful project for Australia to give future generations of Australians.

They need a little bit of help at this stage. They will deliver to you 100 megawatts of permanent energy from their projects in north-west Queensland, but they have to get some assistance at this stage. The PhytoFuel project is from Julia Creek to Hughenden, all along the transmission line from Townsville to Mount Isa. At Hughenden, the Kennedy wind farm is from the same people who built the biggest wind farm in Australia, at Ravenshoe. Once again, the member for Leichhardt, like myself, has been up there many times, admiring the wonderful—and lyrical and poetic; it is a great tourist attraction apart from any other consideration—wind farm they built. They built the biggest wind farm in Australia; now they are going to build one of the biggest in the world at Hughenden. God bless them. They have about 15 or 18 months to finish their full assessment work. What wonderful Australians. The government has to help and support these people.

Finally, most important of all is the solar-biofuels project at Pentland. During the daytime, the power station will run on solar units. For the other 15 or 16 hours a day,
those same units will be run by sugarcane fibre—the residue after we take the sugar out and convert it into ethanol—a wonderful reducer of CO2. Sugarcane ethanol is the par excellence reducer of CO2 in the world, but we burn the sugarcane fibre to get rid of it. At the present moment we do not burn it to generate electricity. In fact only a quarter of our bagasse—what we call sugarcane fibre residue—is burned to produce electricity. All our sugar mills are net exporters of electricity but they should be very big net exporters and they can be.

This project at Pentland with solar during the day and biofuels during the night will produce 500 megawatts of electricity and the million of us that live in North Queensland use about 1,000 megawatts, so half the northern grid or all of the north-west Queensland mineral province grid will be carried by this one proposal and that is not including the wind farm or the PhytoFuels project. Further north—and again member for Leichhardt will back me up here—on the Gilbert river we can double that project.

The honourable member for Leichhardt and I share the great Mitchell River which has as much water in it as the whole of the Murray-Darling put together and it has rolling flat plains almost all the way from Mareeba to Kowanyama. It is a magnificent area for agricultural production. People say, ‘What about the trees?’ Not many trees grow where you only get rainfall for three months of the year. We get a hell of a lot rainfall in that three months, but it is only for that period of time. But we have ample resources there. We can produce a project three times the size on the Mitchell River that we can produce at Pentland off the Burdekin River, which I might add is the third-biggest river in Australia. There is the Murray-Darling, the Mitchell is next and the Burdekin is the third-biggest river in Australia and Pentland is off the Burdekin.

That is 2,000 megawatts of clean electricity forever. In 100 years time the Burdekin will still be running, a little bit of water from it will be diverted, it will be spread out and it will be growing sugarcane—200 years time, if you like—and it will not cost much more than it costs now, because it is a waste product that currently we would burn to get rid of. We put CO2 up into the atmosphere of no value to the Australian people or to the planet. If the rest of the sugar mills in Australia converted over, that would be another 2,000 megawatts of electricity, so what you have done is to reduce your 40,000 megawatts of electricity consumption in Australia by 4,000 megawatts. One-tenth of Australia’s entire electricity supply will be coming from renewables that are not putting CO2 into the atmosphere. In actual fact they will reduce the amount of CO2 already in the atmosphere through sugar, which is a huge absorber of CO2, at 73 tonnes per hectare.

I have not canvassed ethanol and it is a great regret that my country cannot produce a government that could mandate ethanol. What a sad, sad fact of life. I had never been overseas but I broke my duck to do a quick trip to Brazil and the United States ethanol belt. I filled my car up at 84c a litre in Minnesota in the United States. The price here at that time was 134c a litre. I filled up in Sao Paulo in Brazil at 74c a litre. Why are we paying 134c a litre? It is because we do not have a government that has the guts to stand up to the big corporations—that is why. That is the only reason why this country has not moved down a pathway that would probably save 1,000 lives a year—because petrol is carcinogenic whereas ethanol is the most clean and pure form of alcohol. In fact, believe it or not, both Brazil and America moved to ethanol not originally to help sugarcane farmers or their corn farmers, but to clean up the pollution in their major cities. That was the reason they did it. It was origi-
nally legislated in places like California, where they had a dreadful problem with pollution and people were dying everywhere of lung cancer.

I had the great privilege and honour of serving as the Minister for Mines and Energy in the Queensland government. I had effectively four major power stations producing about 1,000 megawatts—I am oversimplifying, but I will just say it that way—and I was in a situation where I had to build a fifth. I was most reluctant. It was going to cost us $1,000 million. We had the cheapest electricity in the world at that stage and I did not want to be remembered as the minister that produced a regime that was not the cheapest in the world, so I cast around for ways to avoid having to build a power station. We went to all the authorities in Australia and the solution was simply solar hot water systems. There was argument on this, but I had no doubt in my mind that I could postpone having to build another power station for nine years if we instituted proper solar hot water systems.

I refer to the work of Professor Szokolay, the leading world authority in this area, which says that 40 per cent of domestic consumption of electricity goes to the heating of water. Solar hot water systems would have enabled us to avoid having to build that power station. And there was no cost imposition. The reduction in electricity costs for the homeowner—we were not going to pay for those hot water systems; the homeowner was going to pay—would offset the price. Ethanol will reduce dramatically the carbon footprint of Australia. Finally, there is the carbon in soil—and I praise both the government and the opposition for getting onto this. Australian soils contain only one-fifth of the carbon that they should contain, and we pay great tribute to the universities that have done this work, but there is no doubt in my mind that this is true. All I can say is that in the banana industry—(Time expired)

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (1.13 pm)—I rise today to support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related legislation. Australia’s emissions trading scheme is an important part of our response to climate change. Emissions trading schemes are recognised around the world as being the right way to tackle climate change. They establish a cap on carbon emissions, and if we are serious about tackling climate change then we need to implement caps. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, our ETS, makes the big polluters pay and that is important. It stands in stark contrast to the opposition’s policy, which is all about making the taxpayers pay. Billions of dollars are going to go to the big polluters from the taxpayers of this country.

Importantly, as part of our bill there is real compensation to households. The impacts of our Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme are that, overall, the average cost of living is expected to increase by about 1.1 per cent in the first two years of the scheme. Under the CPRS a total of 8.1 million households, or 90 per cent of all households, will receive assistance. On average those households will receive around $660 of assistance in 2013.

So we put a cap on carbon pollution; we make the big polluters, not taxpayers, pay; and we provide compensation to those who are really in need in the community, those on low to middle incomes—in particular, people like pensioners and working families. The shadow minister was interjecting before, a bit upset about this, because I think this is the really stark difference between our policy and their policy. We are about making the big polluters pay the cost of their emissions and providing a market based framework that will see business, innovation and research implement ways to reduce carbon pollution.
and their approach is to regulate and then use taxpayers’ money to fund big polluters who may, in appropriate circumstances, reduce carbon emissions—starkly different approaches.

It is no wonder that an emissions trading scheme was agreed to by the former Howard government and by many of those opposite in statements made in public over an extended period of time. The shadow minister has even done a thesis on this, I understand, and is quoted as saying that our market-based system is the right way to tackle climate change. But they have moved away from that. There are no other countries around the world adopting policies like the opposition’s. Thirty-five countries either have implemented or are committed to implementing emissions trading schemes, including many European countries and the United States of America.

Climate change is a problem here—it is a problem in my electorate of Leichhardt, and I am going to come to that—but it is also a global problem, and we need a global solution. We need to adopt climate change policies that tackle the unique challenges Australia faces as a result of climate change, but this needs to be part of a global solution if we are to make real progress on climate change. That is why the government has an unconditional target of five per cent by 2020 but will increase the target to 15 per cent or 25 per cent depending on the international community’s response.

The opposition is supposed to agree with these targets, but it has no plans to reach them. If you are going to be responsible in this debate and establish a target, you have to have a plan to actually achieve that target. We do and the opposition does not. We have to have a framework that allows us to take action in this country, but this is a global problem, so we need to have a framework that also enables us to work with the international community. The businesses in this country—many of them are export or import businesses—operate in a global environment, and we need a response to climate change that also works within a global framework. An emissions trading scheme does. That is why countries all around the world are adopting or committing to adopting it—as I have said, European countries, the United States of America and many others.

Until late last year there was bipartisan support for action on climate change. The legislation that we are presenting today represents negotiations in good faith between the Rudd government and the Liberal opposition last year. It was supported by the coalition caucus late last year, before the climate change sceptics took control of the Liberal Party and anointed Mr Abbott as leader. I know there are many in the Liberal Party who still want to see Australia adopt an ETS, with Liberal senators crossing the floor last year when this legislation was brought to the Senate. It will be interesting to see who joins the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr Turnbull, who I understand is reported to be going to cross the floor and support this legislation, because it was negotiated in good faith.

The Liberals that I hear talking publicly are always banging on about individualism and free thought in the Liberal Party. Well, it will be interesting to see how many of them are prepared to stand up to the conservative faction in their own party that has taken control of it and anointed Mr Abbott as opposition leader. That is the real challenge for them: will other responsible members of the Liberal Party who want to see action on climate change stand up to the conservative leaders in their party and cross the floor on this legislation? We negotiated in good faith with their shadow minister, Ian Macfarlane, and the leadership at that time of the Liberal
We negotiated in good faith, and this legislation represents that, because the Australian people want the Liberal Party, the Labor Party—this parliament—to come together and take action on climate change. That is what this legislation represents. It represents an agreement between the Labor Party and the Liberal Party prior to the conservative forces in the Liberal Party taking control of that party. We can look at that. We know that.

The current Leader of the Opposition—these are not my words but his own words—has described the science on climate change as ‘crap’. It is not the way that I describe it; he has described it as ‘crap’. The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Nick Minchin, is on the record as saying on a Four Corners program that he does not believe that human beings are responsible for climate change. Their finance spokesman, Senator Joyce, whom we have seen this week making some unbelievable comments in public about how they might fund their con job policy, was out last year publicly campaigning against action on climate change and against an ETS.

The Rudd government sat down with the Liberal Party last year and worked out what we believe is an emissions trading scheme in the national interest that will work within a global framework, and we did that in good faith. It will be very interesting to see how those members opposite who really want to take action and be serious about this issue vote on this legislation, because Tony Abbott is quoted as saying he thinks it is ‘crap’; their leader in the Senate, Senator Minchin, has said that he does not believe humans are a part of the reason we are suffering from climate change; and they have appointed a finance spokesman who is an active campaigner against any action.

We need to look at their policy. I have already mentioned that it is going to cost $1.2 billion a year, and I gather that over 10 years that is $10 billion through to 2019-20. It is a hell of a lot of money—a lot of schools, hospitals and programs that can be implemented to actually tackle climate change in a serious way. We have had, not from us—the government—but from the Department of Climate Change, an analysis of this policy released earlier this week. As I said, it is not an emissions trading scheme; it does not put a cap on carbon pollution. Over there they are supposed to have committed to a five per cent target.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! The shadow minister is on shaky ground.

Mr TURNOUR—What does the Department of Climate Change say on this? Their brief shows that emissions will actually increase under Mr Abbott’s policy to be 30 per cent above 2000 levels by 2020 rather than the five per cent reduction he promises. Why would you expect the opposition to bring forward a policy that takes action on climate change? Mr Abbott is quoted as saying it is ‘crap’. The leader in the Senate does not believe it is happening. They have a finance spokesman in the Senate in their economic team who has actually campaigned against it. Why would we expect them to bring forward a policy that was about taking action? It is a climate change con and no wonder the shadow spokesman is upset, because he is on the record with his thesis as saying ‘a market based system’—which is what we have introduced in this legislation—is the right way to tackle this issue.

What the government is bringing forward is legislation that not only fits with the best interests of this country—as negotiated between the Labor and Liberal parties last
year—but also works internationally. It makes sense to me. The world’s population has increased to over six billion people. Over the last 100 years we have seen the world’s population increase significantly. We have seen the industrialisation of the world. This is a good thing in that our standards of living have been increasing. We in the First World have a wonderful standard of living. People in China and India and around the world also want to live like that. It is no wonder then that emissions are increasing and that we face a significant challenge in tackling climate change. It is no wonder then that we need a global solution, but First World countries like Australia need to be taking action.

The IPCC, which has been much maligned by sceptics and critics, has made it clear that the science recognises that there is a real threat of climate change and it will impact on icons like the Great Barrier Reef, the wet tropics rainforests and the Murray-Darling. There are real threats to tourism operators, to people’s livelihoods—whether they are farmers or small business owners—and to people’s ways of life such as those living in coastal communities in Cairns or in the Torres Strait and other parts of the country.

Global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels in 2007 were nearly 40 per cent higher than they were in 1990. As I said, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, said in their 2007 report that the world has already warmed as a result of human emissions of carbon pollution. The IPCC has already recognised that humans are having an impact. The key findings of the IPCC include: average surface temperatures have risen 0.74 degrees in the last 100 years; globally 14 of the 15 warmest years on record occurred between 1995 and 2009; and projected global average surface warming in 2100 is around 1.1 to 6.4 degrees. It is a significant range but, because it is a long way off, we can take action and make a difference, and that is what this legislation is about. I know that the sceptics say that there is some grand conspiracy within the IPCC on this issue.

Let us look at what has been said recently by groups like the Australian Bureau of Meteorology which, I know, is a very well-respected organisation. In my electorate of Leichhardt it provides forecasts on cyclones and droughts. I come from a farming background and the bureau is very well respected in the farming community. The bureau found that the last decade was one of the warmest on record. I will quote from an interview on the ABC with Bureau of Meteorology climatologist David Jones. He said:

… each decade since the 1940s has been warmer than the previous one.

And he has warned that this year is set to be even hotter, with temperatures likely to be between 0.5 and one degrees above average.

“There’s no doubt about global warming, the planet’s been warming now for most of the last century,” he said.

“Occasionally it takes a breather, during La Nina events for example.

“But we’re getting these increasingly warm temperatures—not just for Australia but globally—and climate change, global warming is clearly continuing.

“We’re in the latter stages of an El Nino event in the Pacific Ocean and what that means for Australian and global temperatures is that 2010 is likely to be another very warm year—perhaps even the warmest on record.”

The Bureau of Meteorology, that great bastion of global conspiracy, is saying that climate change is happening and is real. In my electorate of Leichhardt we also have the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, which is a great organisation that I strongly support. Their briefing outlines some of the potential threats that impact on the Great Barrier Reef, the wet tropics rainforests and places like the
Torres Strait. Last weekend we saw king tides in the Torres Strait and we were very lucky that the weather conditions were calm and that houses were not damaged and people’s lives were not lost as a result of those king tides. Combining storms and bad weather with those king tides is extremely dangerous. I recognise that we need to take action on climate change for the longer term, but there are things that we also need to do to mitigate climate change. The government has a whole range of direct action policies that it is implementing to do that.

I want to talk a little bit about the Torres Strait. We have committed $300,000 to do some digital elevation modelling to gain a better understanding of the real threats of climate change, particularly sea level rises in that part of the world. There is a real need to look at creating and building new infrastructure such as, for example, sea walls in the short term. We need to look at the longer term scenarios about what is the long-term future of some of the populations of those islands. People want to stay living there and I would like to see them stay there but we need to look at the scenarios.

One of the scenarios is that the global community takes action; that governments like ours are enabled to implement our emissions trading scheme, join with the United States, India, China and other members of the international community and take real action on climate change to reduce the risk of global warming and a sea level rise. That is a real scenario, a scenario that we are debating today in this House, and if we get the agreement that we negotiated in good faith with the opposition through we will be demonstrating global leadership.

That is a real thing that we can do for people in the Torres Strait, because in the long term that can make a difference. If we do not take action, and if we get stuck with the con job that the opposition has brought forward, then it is likely that sea levels will rise higher than they should and the islands in the Torres Strait will suffer a situation where people may have to move. That would be very sad, and that is not what I want to happen. We need to start working with those communities to make sure we plan for the longer term. That is what I am committed to do. Legislation like this today is very much about ensuring that the longer term gives a scenario where those people can stay living where they are, which is what I want to happen. But we need to take action, and it is very important that we start doing that today.

As I said, the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre has made a number of predictions. The latest climate change projections generated under the MTSRF program that funds that are: by 2030 the regional average annual temperature will increase by between 0.6 of a degree and 1.2 degrees, and after 2030 the rate of increase is highly dependent on emission levels. So after 2030 it is dependent on what we do. They go on to talk about average annual rainfall: it will be smaller and we will be drier. Transitional seasons will become drier and wet seasons will become slightly wetter. Cyclones are likely to be stronger and to create greater damage, not only to infrastructure like houses in Cairns and coastal communities—rising sea levels and higher impact cyclones are a real threat to those houses—but also to forests and those environmental assets that we all depend on in terms of our local economy.

It is critically important that we take action. The IPCC has made it clear that humans are impacting on the rate of climate change. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology has made it clear that we are doing that, and local research organisations like the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre have made it clear that climate change is happening.
I understand that there are sceptics out there who could be concerned about the extent of some of the claims. The reality is that it is prudent to take action. That is why the opposition, prior to the conservative faction in the Liberal Party taking control, wanted to work with us in good faith and support an emissions trading scheme. We are now left in a situation where the real conservatives in the Liberal Party are running the show. Mr Abbott said recently that a four-degree rise in temperatures would not be significant and would not be a real concern. The reality is tourism operators, farmers and people living in the Torres Strait or in coastal communities will suffer the real impact of rising sea levels, higher cyclones, droughts and floods and the like. It is prudent to take action.

That is what this legislation is about; it is about action, and it is part of an overall plan that we have that also includes our 20 per cent renewable energy target and a lot of direct action programs, whether they are ceiling insulation or packages for small- and medium-sized business to fit energy efficiency measures. There is the work we are doing with farming communities. In my own electorate there is the natural resource management group, Terrain, which is looking at how we can make soil carbon part of the solution for climate change.

I support this legislation strongly. (Time expired)

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (1.33 pm)—As always, it is a pleasure to speak on important matters before the House, and this is of course the third occasion in seven months that I have had the opportunity to talk about the government’s ETS, in effect—or the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the spin name put to it instead of the ETS. I presume they think it is more palatable.

Just to pick up on a couple of points from the member for Leichhardt: I think he encapsulates perfectly the arguments put in this place by those on the other side in that they never actually address the legislation. It is really interesting; they never actually talk about the emissions trading scheme. They talk about climate change and whether it is real or not, and the effects it may have if it comes to pass, the dangers that are presented by it and so forth. Some of those points are valid and some are overstated, as per usual in this debate. But you never hear them actually talk about how the emissions trading scheme will work, how it will be implemented and what the legislation actually talks about doing.

I think it is largely because they do not really understand it. They do not really understand that it is going to put a massive new cost on ordinary working Australians, whom I know some members on the other side have had a long association of representing and do care very much about how those people keep their jobs, particularly in the mining industry and the agricultural sector. Those who represent semi-rural seats particularly know that, as do new fathers, as the parliamentary secretary at the table is. We congratulate him very warmly on the recent addition to his family.

Mr Marles—Thank you!

Mr BRIGGS—They understand that any policy change which puts on a new tax or a new cost to industry means that it will be passed on to consumers and it will have an impact on those workers and industries. That is why I think that those on the other side do not ever talk about the specifics of the emissions trading scheme. They will talk about everything else. You heard the member for Leichhardt talk about king tides, which presumably have never occurred before, and you will hear him talk about the Great Barrier Reef. You will hear other members talk about temperature rises, the IPCC and great
conservative conspiracies—apparently in Australia these days you are not allowed to have a different view from the government. If you do, they will censor that on the internet.

You never actually hear the Labor Party address the specifics of the emissions trading scheme. You hear the Prime Minister in question time dodge, weave and duck when it comes to the issue of power prices and the cost increases that will come through the scheme—rather than be honest with people and take them with the government on the journey with respect to this massive economic change. It is a massive economic change, whether you agree with emissions trading or not, and it will change the structure of our economy and increase the costs in our economy enormously. They never take people with them on that; they try to avoid the detail and the specifics and talk about the overall issue of climate change, the effects of climate change, the science of climate change and the great conservative conspiracies—so they claim—against it.

If you look back in this country’s history on the big debates that have changed the economy, whichever side you agreed with, the Prime Minister and the government of the day took the Australian people into their confidence. How the GST would work was explained fully before it was taken to an election. The Labor Party ran holus-bolus against it. It was their right in a democracy to do so, but there was a debate. The government of the day took the people with them. They told them why they wanted to reform the tax system. In 2005, when significant workplace relations reform was introduced into the parliament, the Prime Minister of the day explained the legislation at the dispatch box in this place. It was vehemently disagreed with by those on the other side. They fought tooth and nail against it, as was their right, but they argued their case.

The problem with the Labor Party in this debate is that they have never told the Australian people what this emissions trading scheme will do. They have talked about climate change, the effects of climate change and why we need to address it. They talk about all of the big-picture issues to do with climate change and say, ‘We need to take action, and this is action.’ But they never actually say what the action is. They never actually say, ‘To reduce the threat of climate change we need to put a cost on carbon, which means there needs to be an impact on the households of Australia of $120 billion over 10 years.’ That is a significant change to our economy, but the unfortunate bit for the Labor Party is they currently do not have the gumption to explain that to people. They want to slip and slide it through, all on the overall basis of, ‘We’re for action; they’re against action.’

The problem is that people have started to work this out, and all credit to the shadow minister for climate action, who is at the table, for his work on this. If you really want to lose a couple of hours of your time, go and take him on about the details of direct action on climate change. There are very few people who know as much about this issue as the shadow minister. Some would argue that he knows too much about it, and the conversation on the detail can become a little tiresome after a while. He does know too much about soil carbon in my view. No-one should know that much about that sort of thing! But he does know it, and that is why we have such a good, solid policy foundation. He has convinced the Leader of the Opposition, who is absolutely sure that direct action is the best way to address this significant issue.

There are people on our side of politics who question the science of climate change, and I say they are entitled to have a perspective and to argue their perspective. I believe that it is in our best interests to make some
adjustments to the way that we operate, because the benefit of the doubt should be given to the planet. I tend to agree with the Rupert Murdoch approach to this: we should give the planet the benefit of the doubt. Therefore, we should look at addressing, where we can, improvements to the way that we power and sustain our world. We do have a big challenge going forward, with increasing populations and the amount of development in formerly rural and agricultural areas, where we have taken more than we should have, like in the Murray-Darling Basin. We do need to become more sustainable, we do have an impact on the planet and we should do things, where appropriate, about that. There is no question about that.

However, you also have to look at the most effective way to address the question of sustainability and the question of climate change. Some would argue, with some passion, that an emissions trading scheme, or a price on carbon, is the most effective way to go. My view is, in an international context with the big emitters as part of the picture, an emissions trading scheme has a lot of merit. However, Australia doing it on its own, outside of an international agreement and binding targets, would be to tie an anvil around our own economic ankle and jump into the water. If you were serious about addressing climate change, you would realise that all that will do is push the dirty industries to other countries which do not have these regulations and requirements. You will have the same, if not more, emissions through emissions leakage, because those industries will be less efficient and use less effective technologies than they would if they continued to operate in Australia. Doing that would destroy thousands of jobs and the opportunity of thousands of people for a better life. So we do have a responsibility in this place to look at the detail of proposals that have been put forward by the government.

At no point have the government ever given a detailed explanation in this place about how their scheme will work and what effect it will have. If you were to listen to the debate presented by those opposite, in particular the Prime Minister, you would think there was to be no impact on households, jobs or industry—which is completely untrue. Of course there is an impact. We have identified our impact on the Australian budget at just over $3 billion. We have said we would fund that with our direct action. Seriously, it is time in this debate—and it is now the third time we have had to debate this legislation in the parliament—for the government to come in and explain how it will work, to come in and take people into their confidence and to come in and explain why they think an emissions trading scheme, absent action by the rest of the world, is the best way to address it, compared to the direct action approach that the shadow minister and the Leader of the Opposition have proposed, the well-thought-through, detailed, documented approach that we have proposed this week.

The question about international action is one that is extremely pertinent to this debate. The previous debates we have had on this legislation took place prior to the Copenhagen conference. I checked back on my contributions to those debates last year, and in June, when I made a point about the Copenhagen conference, I commented that I thought that the political capital of President Obama would probably ensure that there was a successful outcome at the Copenhagen conference. Unfortunately that did not come to pass. The Copenhagen conference was, in anyone’s view, a complete failure. In fact, I think it set action on this issue back quite some way. There are reasons for that, and some of them are very good, in particular the attitude of the Chinese and some of the developing nations to what they see as policies
which will restrict their growth at a time they
do not want to be pursuing policies which
restrict their growth.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to hear
Condoleezza Rice, the former US Secretary
of State, speak and she made the comment
about China’s growth that to understand
what China will do in these international
negotiations you just have to look at what
they want domestically. They need to con-
tinue to grow domestically because they
have all these internal pressures and lever-
gages like 200 million people a year looking
to move from very poor rural arrangements
to the lower middle class in the cities, so
they need to create 200 million new jobs.
They need to continue to grow at eight or
nine per cent just to keep the social cohesion,
for what it is worth, in that country. That is
what the government is constantly very
aware of. Are they going to do anything
which risks that domestic growth? No way.
They are not going to sign up to something
which is going to put at risk that domestic
growth. They cannot afford to do that.

So how are we going to get this interna-
tional agreement to move forward? I do not
think there is any doubt that it is a very diffi-
cult road. It really does underline why we
need to be very careful with the steps that we
take. If we jump ahead of the world and we
implement a whole big new tax on our indus-
try and our consumers before China, India
and the United States do, we will create a
massive rod for our own back. The Waxman-
Markey bill, which members will be familiar
with and which is before the US Senate,
faces a very difficult road this year with the
change in the political landscape in the
United States in recent days. Comments
made as recently as today, I understand, indi-
cate that given the difficulties this bill will
face the President is now looking at direct
action, which is exactly what the shadow
minister has proposed.

You are starting to see a picture here,
which is that this ETS has been rushed. It has
been rushed through without detail being
given to the Australian people. It has been
rushed through without the impacts it will
have outside of world action being thought
through well enough. Even if you do believe
in Australia taking action—and I am one
who does believe that we should take ac-
tion—you have to think about the most ef-
fective and best action that you can take.
What we have been able to do is to present a
package of proposals through the shadow
minister and the Leader of the Opposition
that directly addresses this issue. What we
see from the other side is a game of politics
being played where they want to talk about
us versus them and what we believe and they
don’t because it suited their political agenda
for some time.

The issue here is simple. The Leader of
the Opposition, in his own robust typical
fashion, is being very open and honest with
the Australian people. We will spend just
over $3 billion a year on addressing this
challenge of climate change. The govern-
ment intends to put a massive new cost struc-
ture into the economy without actually tell-
ing people how that will work or without
being honest that it will have a genuine effect
on their lives or without being honest with
people that it will not achieve the environ-
mental outcomes that they expect. Those on
the other side talk about the fact that we are
not putting a restriction on emissions. Nor
does the government’s ETS. It puts a price
on carbon, but it is not restricting the amount
of emissions. So it is a false debate which is
being run by those on the other side because
it is about politics.

Finally, I think today—this is the third op-
portunity I have had to speak on this bill—
we will be defeated if those who represent
workers in semirural electorates do not cross
the floor and do the right thing by their
workers. But, presuming those members do not cross the floor and the legislation passes along party lines, it most probably will be defeated in the Senate again. I do not think we will see it again this year because I think that the Prime Minister has worked out that his approach on this issue has been wrong. We heard him say the other day that he has not taken people with him. He is right about that. The question will be: is he honest enough to come in today and talk about how much power prices will rise and what impact it will have on the cost of food, Australian jobs and emissions? That will be the question rather than the overall ‘we believe and you don’t’ debate that we have had time after time in this place. We might actually finally see some honest debate about a very significant issue. I congratulate the shadow minister at the table for the work he has done on this issue and also the Leader of the Opposition. I just hope the government, rather than continuing to push for this piece of legislation, is able to actually sit down and put some real measures in to address this serious issue.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (1.49 pm)—It is my pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and cognate bills. In doing that I think it is important to reflect on why we are reintroducing these bills. We are reintroducing them primarily because we have a mandate from the Australian people to introduce an emissions carbon trading scheme. That is what we went to the Australian people with prior to the election and that is what we promised the Australian people that we would deliver. We know that those on the other side, the former government, under Prime Minister Howard had the same policy. They believed that an emissions trading scheme was the best solution to deal with climate change and the overwhelming science is saying that climate change is caused by carbon pollution and carbon in our atmosphere and the way to deal with it is to put a price on carbon.

All the countries around the world are implementing carbon pollution reduction schemes. We have 30 countries—including those in Europe, Japan and New Zealand—that either have introduced or are introducing a carbon pollution reduction scheme. The reason they are doing that is that overwhelmingly everybody agrees the best way to deal with it is to put a price on carbon. But that is not what we have seen from those opposite with their proposal. As we know, their proposal is some magic potion that obviously nobody else in the world has thought of other than Tony Abbott. He is the only one who has this great brilliant idea about another way to reduce carbon emissions. If it is so brilliant, why didn’t anybody other than Tony Abbott come up with it? It is just farcical to come into this place and say that their solution is going to reduce carbon and meet the target of five per cent—our target which they have agreed is a consensus target of a five per cent reduction in emissions over that time. As I said, there is clearly scientific consensus that climate change is happening and caused by carbon in our atmosphere and we need to reduce it. It has been accepted by the majority of scientists and it is accepted by the majority of governments.

We have set our target and the CPRS and an emissions trading scheme is clearly the best way to achieve that. That is why we are reintroducing this bill. But we have been upfront with the Australian people, unlike what the previous speaker, the member for Mayo, was trying to indicate. We have said that, yes, you cannot reduce carbon, you cannot move to a low-carbon economy, without a cost, and the sooner you introduce legislation, the sooner you provide a surety for people about how you are going to do that, the less cost to the economy there will
be. You have got to act now and the sooner you act the less cost there will be down the track. So we all know that that is why we are doing this, why we are reintroducing this bill.

I have spoken on this bill before and I have spoken about the impacts in my electorate of Franklin in southern Tasmania. It has a lot of coastal areas. Specifically in my last speech I referred to a report that has been done and I want to revisit that because I think it is really quite significant. It is on the climate change impacts on Clarence coastal areas. Clarence City Council is a municipality in my electorate which has a lot of coastline, and it has had a report done that has been funded by the Australian Department of Climate Change and the state government’s emergency service. It reveals quite a compelling argument for action on climate change. It says that we need to act now because we are already having issues with the coastal areas in the electorate. We have 191 kilometres of coastline, much of which is low-lying, and major floods and storms are raising number a concerns particularly for residents of Lauderdale and Roches Beach. I would have thought that most people in this place who have coastal areas in their electorates would be very concerned about the need to act on climate change and the need to act now. That is why we are reintroducing this legislation, because we want to provide some surety for people. We want to put a price on carbon because most governments around the world understand that that is the best way that you can reduce carbon pollution in the atmosphere.

I want to go back to Tony Abbott’s plan. We all know about the plan he has dreamt up, this magic potion, in the last six weeks that nobody else in the world has thought of before. He is always going on about this. We have heard the confession from the member for Mayo that there are people opposite who do not believe in climate change. I thank the member for Mayo for being so upfront that there are people on his side of the chamber who do not believe in climate change. And of course we have heard Tony Abbott himself say that he thinks climate change is ‘absolute crap’. What is really interesting about those on the other side and the confession from the member for Mayo is that the member for Mayo even went so far as to say that he thinks an emissions trading scheme has some merit. I call on those on the other side who do believe in climate change and who do believe that an emissions trading scheme has some merit to come over here and vote with us for an emissions trading scheme that will actually reduce carbon in the atmosphere because we are going to put a price on it. That is how you actually reduce it. I think it is important that those on the other side think very carefully about their position on this, and I am looking forward to Malcolm Turnbull’s contribution when he gets to speak on the bill, because he has made it very clear that he still supports an emissions trading scheme. That is why we had that in good faith negotiation and discussion last year when we introduced this bill before. We had a mandate from the Australian people and we wanted to provide certainty for businesses and the economy on this issue. That is why we had those discussions, because we know that a lot of those opposite really believe that an emissions trading scheme is the way to go, and specifically that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the way to go.

The Leader of the Opposition has also quite clearly been on the record, which is interesting, saying that polluters going about their usual business will not be affected. How can you say to big, heavy polluters that it is still okay to pollute, when you accept the need to do something on climate change? I do not get that. I am sure there are plenty of
people around here who are prepared to put some spin on how that would work, but I do not get it. The best way is to make big polluters pay and to support working families as the adjustments in the economy are being made. We have been upfront that there are going to be costs to the economy. We have costed our policy and, more importantly, we have funded it; we have worked out how we are going to pay for our CPRS. We still have to hear from the opposition, although we have had a few leaks here and there, about how they might actually fund their $10 billion over 10 years. They really are struggling to work out how they are going to pay for this. It is unfunded at the moment. We have heard some discussions and there have been a few slips of the tongue about some of the things they might do to pay for this, things like stopping overseas aid, sacking a few public servants. We have even heard a rumour that they have a secret tax agenda, and goodness only knows what is in that. So I look forward to that coming out. The only way they can pay for their policy realistically is to introduce new taxes or to cut existing services. Either of those will impact on the working people of this country. We at least have a plan to support working people while the adjustments to the economy are made under our plan. They have not given any thought to the working families of this country, they just want to slug them an extra tax and cut services to pay for their brilliant plan that nobody else in the world came up with except Tony Abbott in six weeks. Of the 30 nations across the world that are introducing an emissions trading scheme or are looking towards it, who realise that an emissions trading scheme is the solution, no-one else has come up with Tony Abbott’s brilliant plan—and I wonder why that is. I think it might be because it is not that great a plan.

The current Leader of the Opposition is now in the chamber and I am glad to address him directly. We all know that he has had so many different positions on the CPRS. He supported it when he was a government minister. As I said before, he said it was absolute crap. He then said that the Liberals should support a CPRS unamended. Then he demanded amendments. Now he opposes it totally. Why does he oppose it totally? Because he thinks it might be politically popular for a short-term gain. He is not thinking about the working families that we have thought about in our policy, where we are going to assist them with the adjustments to the economy that are going to occur as we adjust to a low-carbon economy. They are not thinking about working families; they want to slug them with an extra tax or cut services. That is the only way they can fund their policy.

I call on those opposite who have admitted that they believe in climate change, and even those like the member for Mayo, who said he thinks an emissions trading scheme might have some merit, to come over here and vote with us and to tell us what they really think. He said there is plenty of room in the Liberal Party for broad thought, for people to say what they think. Well, I would like them to put it on the record. I would like them to come into this place and to vote for what they believe in.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2.00 pm, the debate is interrupted. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (2.00 pm)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Prime Minister from making a statement on the first anniversary of the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires, at 2 pm, and the Leader of the Opposition
Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—A year ago this Sunday, Australia’s worst natural disaster tore through Victoria. It also tore through the hearts of Australia. The firestorm that swept through Victorian forests, fields and towns on 7 February 2009 caused unspeakable tragedy and loss for thousands of Australians. The Black Saturday bushfires were catastrophic in their scale and in their impact—173 Australians lost their lives and more than 800 others were injured, some with horrific burns; more than 1,800 homes were destroyed; and more than 15,000 people registered as affected by the fires at relief centres and other official areas in the days after the firestorm.

This weekend people around Australia will be remembering the events of one year ago. On Sunday, I will be attending a special memorial service at St Paul’s Cathedral in Melbourne to mark this first anniversary. We in this place all remember towns like Kinglake, Flowerdale, Marysville, Kilmore, Strathewen, Wandong and Whittlesea. We remember those who lost everything—family, friends, homes, livelihoods. We remember those who are still recovering from injuries suffered that day, who are still rebuilding their homes and who are still rebuilding their lives, and those who are battling painful and traumatic memories. We also remember the bravery and the heroism of the firefighters and other volunteers, many of whom battled to save their neighbours’ properties while their own homes burned to the ground; the courage of people like Peter Thorneycroft, a local tradesman who climbed on the roof of the Kinglake National Park Hotel as a fire roared around it and, armed only with a hose, doused cinders and hot ash for an hour to keep safe the 20 women and children sheltering inside—absolute courage. We remember the skill and dedication of the paramedics, the doctors and the nurses who treated the injuries—the horrific injuries.

This was a tragedy that shook our entire nation. This was a tragedy that shook our entire people. In the hours and days after this catastrophe, all Australians rallied behind those who had lost much. Farmers from around the nation, already battling drought, sent hay to feed the livestock struggling to survive in burnt-out paddocks. Donations of clothes and food flooded in, driven by truckies who simply got into their rigs and drove for hours—and in some case days, sometimes right across the country—to help their fellow Australians. And $318 million was donated to the Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Recovery Fund.

The survivors in these devastated communities showed extraordinary courage and resilience. Sporting clubs and school halls became emergency relief centres—reuniting families and providing a bed and roof to those with no home, food and clothes, to those who escaped the inferno with nothing more than the clothes on their backs.

Government departments and agencies swung into action to deal with the complex, immediate and unprecedented needs of thousands of people: Centrelink; the Department of Human Services; the Department of Defence; the Army; the Australia tax office; the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; the Attorney-General’s Department; the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts; and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. These dedicated public servants worked long and hard to help traumatised people who had been left without access to money and without even basic forms of iden-
tification—people who needed immediate practical help like emergency cash payments as well as support and counselling. On behalf of the House, I would like to thank all those Australians and all those Australian government officials and Victorian government officials who put their shoulder to the wheel in the sustained relief and recovery effort.

James, a 70-year-old survivor from Marysville, called his local call centre to express his and his wife’s thanks and gratitude for their support. He said, ‘Even though we had lost everything, you people make me proud to be an Australian.’ These public servants worked alongside non-government organisations like the Australian Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, Oxfam, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, VicRelief Foodbank, the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. Local businesses helped where they could in whatever practical ways that they could, like the local pharmacy in Yea, which donated its fax machine to Centrelink staff to help them process claim forms more quickly.

The government acknowledges the many volunteers, both paid and unpaid, and those who continue to provide assistance and support throughout the reconstruction and recovery process. Many firefighters, emergency services personnel and community volunteers work tirelessly to assist communities. Their acts of kindness, compassion and bravery have kept many people going in the face of this adversity.

The work continues today. As of 11 January, 3,053 fire affected properties had been cleaned up—that is, we are advised, 99 per cent of the affected properties. Nearly 1,000 building permits have been issued by the bushfire affected councils. Thirty community recovery committees have contributed to local rebuilding needs and priorities. Temporary villages continue to run at Marysville, Kinglake and Flowerdale and temporary accommodation remains available at Whittlesea.

The Australian government is continuing to work closely with the Victorian government, local government, communities, businesses and non-government organisations to help the reconstruction and recovery of these communities. The Australian government has committed more than $455 million to the relief, recovery and reconstruction effort. We continue to support these efforts alongside the Victorian government and the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority. We provided $52.3 million towards the authority’s reconstruction plan entitled Rebuilding Together—A Statewide Plan for Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery. Local governments have also played a critical and integral role in supporting their communities during an overwhelming time of sadness and loss.

As well as being an important influence on the direction of the recovery process, the Australian government is committed to applying the lessons of this tragic event. We remain committed to assisting the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

One year on, we pause to remember and we pause to reflect. We congratulate those who are rebuilding and we acknowledge those who are still wrestling with the agonising decision of whether to stay and rebuild or whether to move away. As we mark the first anniversary of Black Saturday, I urge all Australians to keep in their thoughts and in their prayers all those who have been and continue to be affected by these fires. On behalf of the Australian government and the Australian parliament, I say to those people: our thoughts and our prayers and our sympathies are with you all.
Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.09 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to associate the opposition with the eloquent words of the Prime Minister to commemorate the first anniversary of Black Saturday. Black Saturday, 7 February 2009, is the worst peacetime disaster in Australian history—173 people lost their lives, including 38 in Kinglake, 34 in Marysville and 27 in Strathewen. There were 2,029 homes destroyed, 2,439 buildings destroyed and 59 commercial premises lost. This was loss on an unimaginable scale.

Following the tragedy, as the news slowly emerged, Australians were successively shocked, saddened and ultimately bewildered at the scale of the devastation and the realisation that death could stalk even the most peaceful and idyllic Australian landscapes. There was that deep but hard to express grief at people’s almost unthinkable loss, and then, with volunteer fire brigades from around Australia sending fresh teams to the front, with hundreds of thousands of people sending goods and money to those who had escaped with their lives but little else, and with the whole nation sending its prayers, there was a quiet pride in the way our country had faced the fury of nature at its most extreme and responded to the tragedy.

All levels of government promised to do everything in their power to restore as far as possible normal life, and these promises, which were sincerely given, I am happy to say have been efficiently kept. I commend everyone professionally involved in the relief efforts. In rebuilding their lives, the members of these communities have shown the best of the Australian spirit and in our solidarity with them I think we have deepened our sense of collective humanity.

We honour the memory of those lost, we salute the courage of those living and we resolve to learn the lessons of that terrible day. Mr Speaker, I now defer to the members representing the communities most affected.

Fran Bailey (McEwen) (2.11 pm)—This weekend our nation will pause and it will reflect and it will honour the 173 men, women and children who lost their lives a year ago on Black Saturday. This weekend will be a particularly tough weekend for many of the communities in my electorate. We still have large numbers of people who are very severely traumatised. Some people will want to gather and will want to exchange stories; some will be quietly introspective. There will be lots of tears; there will be lots of laughter as well. And, Mr Speaker, there will be lots of hugs.

I think all of those people would want me today to once again express and acknowledge the thanks of so many that have already been referred to. The Prime Minister referred to the countless numbers of public servants, including for example the Centrelink manager who, after going off duty, then went and volunteered to do some fencing. I can give hundreds of stories like that. There are the thousands and thousands of Australians who donated money, goods and services; the thousands of volunteers who travelled long distances simply to lend a helping hand. Those efforts have been absolutely magnificent in themselves but, most importantly, they have shown the people of my communities that they were not on their own; that Australians everywhere were with them.

This weekend also provides us with an opportunity to focus on the future, and never before has it been so important to harness the energy, the commitment, the tenacity, the resilience and the sheer willpower of these people in so many of our devastated communities and to allow them to direct the rebuilding of their own communities. I thank the House.
Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (2.14 pm)—I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for McEwen. I am pleased to say that the recovery effort in relation to the Bendigo fires is proceeding very, very well, thanks to the cooperation between the three tiers of government—Commonwealth, state and local—and is well advanced. I guess, compared to the area looked after by the member for McEwen, we got off relatively lightly in Bendigo. We lost some 61 homes and, unfortunately, one life. We had another fire just out of Bendigo at the same time, where there were another 11 or 12 homes demolished and there was the loss of countless numbers of livestock, fences et cetera.

As we approach the anniversary, it is worthwhile again thanking those who performed so magnificently during those fires. The City of Greater Bendigo’s disaster relief plan worked perfectly. Bendigo is a major regional centre, and all of these agencies were able to be on tap at 6 am the next day. They did so well. ABC Radio also played a superb role, keeping people informed. It all went extremely well, considering it was the worst disaster in Bendigo’s history. Unfortunately, the fires were deliberately lit. As some of you would know, two young boys were charged just a few days ago with lighting those fires—and that matter will take its course. I would like to again associate myself with the comments of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for McEwen.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (2.15 pm)—On Jon Faine’s ABC morning program on the bushfire recovery, months after the fires: a woman’s voice. She had lost her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren to the Black Saturday fires. The unveiled tears flooded the airways of the ABC. Her unbridled grief called a halt to all other thoughts as we entered into her daily pain, her broken heart and her immense loss. As her story unfolded, tears fell freely as I stood locked into the moment, a life exposed for every listener to hear and feel.

Each of us carries such burdens of tragedy in our own way. Some choose life and strike out with renewed hope; others change and are diminished by their experience. For me, there is no condemnation as to how you may cope. Our task is to understand that grief has different forms and, having not stood in the shoes of the grieving, allow for time, however long, to heal, restore and mend.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (2.17 pm)—I join with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the member for McEwen, the member for Bendigo, the member for McMillan and also with the member for Casey, who spoke very well this morning in the Main Committee and expressed his sentiments on the 12-month anniversary. There is not much I can add after the member for McMillan’s comments—and I congratulate you, Russell, for the way that you have conducted yourself over the past 12 months. It has been an emotionally raw time for a lot of us—and, if it is raw for us, imagine what it is like for the people involved.

To Bill Shorten, the minister in charge of the bushfire reconstruction: I thank you for your efforts—in particular, for always being able to help the people of Gippsland in a very bipartisan way. On behalf of my community, where we lost 11 lives, 175 homes in the area of Callignee, Traralgon South and Koornalla and 20 homes the previous week in Boolarra, I want to put on the record how very thankful they are for the support they have received from this place. We received many comments from my community as a result of the way this place behaved after the bushfires. There were so many positive comments on the way the parliament of Aus-
Australia conducted itself in that week and the months that have followed. They are very grateful for the support they have received.

There is one other message for me to pass on on behalf of my community, and that is: do not forget that there is still a long way to go with the recovery process. While the bush will recover, the regrowth is there now and homes are being built, people will recover at very different speeds. Long after the scars on the landscape have recovered, the scars will still be there for them both physically and mentally. So they will need our support for many years ahead. We must never forget them and we must learn from the experience that we have been through in these past 12 months. I thank the House for the opportunity today.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (2.19 pm)—I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the other members of parliament who have spoken. It is a long way back from 7 February last year. Many people have lived eternities of regret in just one year, sifting memories from the ashes and recalling faces that are now gone. The things that we remember having shared are the substance of love, and when those things are gone then, indeed, love itself is threatened unless we jointly remember and jointly restore what we can.

The towns and the farms are still there, as are the roads, the yards, the hills and the creeks where people played and grew up. Many people have experienced circumstances beyond nightmare which one would hope never to experience. A long rebuild has followed so far after a fire that took everything—the family photos, the war medals, the books that were passed down from the parents to the children, the backyard trees that seemed so big when you were so little, the horse that ran off into the flames and never came back and the pet dog which was so hurt that it had to be put down. The long return from such a day can be hard beyond bearing for those who have lost property. In fact, when you lose property in a fire you realise how closely and deeply it is linked to the memories that make us who we are. But there are those for whom it was even worse in the days after the fire—those who waited weeks for the release from the coroner of perhaps the remains of a child or a father, and those too-long delayed funerals, and those who were kept away for days on end from those black and smouldering crime scenes, which were their family homes, only to return to find that there was nothing left.

Many of these people carry burdens of their own and they are dealing with their own losses. Many have coped with the aftermath of the fire by turning their loss into a desire to rebuild and to help others heal. They have had leadership thrust upon them and they have coped with this admirably. Some of the leadership that we have seen in the communities is not flashy or the barking of orders; it is just the quiet gesture of carrying on and putting one foot in front of the other. The work that is being done by the local community recovery committees deserves particular mention and recognition. It has been essential in ensuring that the spirit and the essence of communities remain—as has the work of Premier John Brumby and Christine Nixon, the chair of the reconstruction authority.

Rebuilding has been a slow process, and I think that we all wish that it was happening quicker. But, as we travel around the fire-affected communities, we can see that good things are happening—from the radio station at Kinglake to the first sods being turned at the new learning hub at Marysville. The
neighbours’ faces do help. Their decision, his and hers, to rebuild, to stay, to confer and to share the memories has been important. Fundamentally, communities help here. The idea of community helps—the idea that no one of us is an island and the place we stand on is common ground.

As we approach this Sunday, we cannot replace the people who are not here or take back the memories of 7 February last year, but we can support the people who are there and their efforts to rebuild. We cannot bring back a lot of things and we cannot expunge regret, but we can embrace with feeling what remains and we can build with hope on those burnt foundations at the first anniversary. A way of life is being rebuilt which still has joy in it, with neighbourhood and comradeship, with a shared kindness which we all appreciate in all our homes and communities. That process, that rescue, that restoration, is well begun and it will continue past the anniversary.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (2.22 pm)—I would like to associate myself with the comments made already and to remind the House that, although there were many Australians who suffered in rural and regional Victoria, there were so many generous Australians from right around the country. They were generous not just in donating money but in donating their time and their services—firefighters, emergency workers and the like—and I would like to thank them as well.

What we saw was something that we often see in Australia in a time of need and that is that those Australians with the least to give give the most. All you had to do was look at the cars parked outside the CFA sheds to see that people gave of their time. They dropped their jobs and left their families to assist.

My only plea on behalf of people in my part of Victoria, north-east Victoria, is that governments at all levels, when they are looking at fire mitigation and the management of crown land—not only in the reconstruction stages—actually listen to the people who live in those areas, who live amongst those national parks, who know how to manage those areas and who know how to fight fires. Do not ignore local country people. They know what they are doing and, in future bushfire disasters and the like, we need to take that local knowledge into account.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (2.24 pm)—I, too, want to associate myself with the remarks being made by members. The Horsham Remlaw Road fire was by no means anywhere near as extensive as the fires that have been described by other members, but the impact was much the same. Nine dwellings—nine homes with all their memorabilia and museums of fond memories—were destroyed, and the identification with other parts of rural Victoria, with such massive losses of life, has made it very real. There will be commemorative functions at Haven this weekend. Haven was the suburb of the city of Horsham which took the brunt of the Remlaw Road fire.

There are a lot of people that I would like to thank, including the Prime Minister, who showed an interest in that fire and made sure that the people of Wimmera were not left out of the considerations and expressions of empathy and support. I, too, would like to thank the member for Maribyrnong for his visits and the assistance he provided. There is an organisation that needs to be thanked, too, that has not been mentioned yet, which is the Insurance Council of Australia. There were immense problems associated with insurance, but they formed a task force and all of those problems have been resolved.

The only remaining dilemma for the people of the city of Horsham is the replacement of their famous golf club. It was, sadly, underinsured and completely destroyed. It was
as if a bombshell had hit it. I am hopeful that, between the state and federal governments, we might still find a way to assist that community and restore that magnificent facility. It has an enormous international reputation and the community itself has got right behind that golf club, recognising its community significance, as has the international golfing community. Even the University of Ballarat has provided a building to be utilised as a club room, but it is by no means adequate. That remains about the only undone business from the Remlaw Road fire.

I will be looking forward to the opportunity of sharing in the commemorative functions in Haven. To all of those people involved, I express my special appreciation.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (2.26 pm)—I want to endorse the sentiments of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues in this place and to say that, in the lead-up to New Year, the town of Toodyay was also threatened with a fire. It destroyed 38 homes and one person was burned. Fortunately, no-one lost their lives, but I know that the people of Toodyay would like me to express their thanks today to the people of Victoria, because there was an instant response of offers of help, donations, goods and people who flew from Victoria to Toodyay to practically assist the people of Toodyay. So, I know the people of Toodyay would want me to pass on their thanks and to let the people of Victoria know that they will be thinking about them this weekend on the anniversary of the events of last year.

The SPEAKER—The House, through its quiet attention to the remarks of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the member for McEwen, the member for Bendigo, the member for McMillan, the member for Gippsland, the Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and the members for Indi, Mallee and Pearce, has shown its support for the sentiments expressed. The solemn reflection is also indicative that the remarks that were made 12 months ago in this House have been reconfirmed and that our thoughts for those that suffered in the bushfires and suffer in further natural events are still here and that they will continue into the full rehabilitation and reconstruction. I thank the House.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.28 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will be absent from question time today as he is in Perth attending his sister’s funeral. The Attorney-General will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Health and Ageing will also be absent from question time today. The Minister for Ageing will answer questions on her behalf. The Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport will be late to question time today as she is representing me at the Prime Minister’s XI cricket match function, a match in which we are not doing too well at the moment. In her absence, the Deputy Prime Minister will answer questions in relation to early childhood education, child care and youth and the Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery will answer questions in relation to sport.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Climate Change

Mr ABBOTT (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to overnight news reports that President Obama is likely to drop his emissions trading scheme in the United States. Given this important development, I ask the Prime Minister why he still wants to foist upon Australia a complex, costly and almost incomprehensible scheme?
Mr RUDD—My first response to the Leader of the Opposition’s question is that the decision to back an emissions trading scheme in this country was first taken by John Howard as Prime Minister of Australia two years ago. The second point is that it was a decision also supported by the then Treasurer, Mr Costello, and, until five or six weeks ago, it was a decision supported by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Wentworth. It has also been a position supported by the member for Flinders and various members that I can identify across the front bench of the coalition.

On the question of the United States, which the honourable member has asked about, can I say this: in the United States President Obama confronts an institution which is well known to this place as well—it is called ‘the senate’. The senate in the United States is not necessarily going to be accommodating of his aspirations to introduce an emissions trading scheme. On the question of global action in emissions trading I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to answer this: why is it that 30 advanced economies around the world have made the same decision as John Howard, Peter Costello, Malcolm Turnbull and, until six weeks ago, all of those represented opposite? The reason for this change is that those opposite have chosen instead a path which is all about the politics of complaint, not the policy of solution.

Climate Change

Ms GEORGE (2.31 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the importance of a market based emissions trading system as the best method to transition to a low-pollution economy of the future?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for her question. The preface to her question is an important one, because this Labor government has been committed to a market based response to dealing with the challenge of climate change, as historically has the Liberal Party of Australia as opposed to those opposite, who now adopt what has been elegantly described by the former Leader of the Opposition as a ‘command and control’ approach to bringing about any effective change on climate change.

Reform in Australia is a hard business; it always has been. Therefore, when you look at this challenge of climate change, it will be hard in this area as well. If we look back over the last quarter of a century, we can see that the reforms, back in the eighties and nineties, to the Australian economy were hard-won reforms. The reforms that introduced compulsory superannuation, for example, were hard-won reforms. This economy, a quarter of a century later, benefits from governments which had the courage to make hard decisions in hard areas of reform. Had those decisions not been taken by governments back then, the flexibility of our economy to deal most recently with the challenges of the global financial crisis would have been put to the test indeed.

The reform which the economy must undergo in relation to climate change falls exactly into this category. We can either undertake this reform now for the future or we can continue to push it off and push it off and push it off. If we continue to push it off, as those opposite are recommending in their approach, then the reality is that the costs of climate change then come back to fundamentally undermine our future economic wellbeing, whether through its impact on agriculture, the devastation of the Murray-Darling, the impact on tourism in the Great Barrier Reef or the intensification of drought across our nation, our economy and our rural communities as well.
It was for these reasons that, having conducted a large number of investigations, the Howard government, through the task group on emissions trading, the Garnaut review, the UK Stern report on the economics of climate change—all these independent examinations—reached one conclusion: the most effective and least costly means to execute change in response to the challenge of climate change was through a market based system. That was the conclusion they reached and that is why all those individual governments and political leaders at the time reached the same conclusion. Our approach to climate change is based on five core principles: (1) the science; (2) cost; (3) effectiveness; (4) our global engagement; and (5) consistency of approach. On the science, it is fundamental that we on this side of the House accept the climate change science. The Leader of the Opposition has stated elegantly—or inelegantly but effectively—his view on the climate change science. In his own words: climate change is ‘absolute crap’. That is his view. That is not the government’s view.

The House may be interested to know what the shadow minister responsible for climate change had to say on the science today. In an interview on 4 February on NewsRadio, the member for Flinders answered in these terms: ‘My view is very clear. I happen to be, on balance, of the view that the science for climate change is strong and compelling.’

Mr Hunt—I give up!

Mr Rudd—He has given up! Well done, Greg. I say to the member for Flinders that the Leader of the Opposition has given up, and that is the point. I commend the member for Flinders for at least sticking to his consistent position on accepting the science of climate change. This contrasts with the view of the leader he now serves. The Leader of the Opposition now says: ‘The science is not entirely settled; there is still considerable room to question on this.’ And elsewhere he has said that he is ‘entirely underwhelmed’ by the science. More compellingly, in his own vernacular, he says that it is ‘absolute crap’. We have a Leader of the Opposition, the alternative Prime Minister of Australia who says that climate change is absolute crap and a shadow minister for the environment who says that the evidence is strong and compelling. Is it any wonder that the parliament of the nation is confused on this question?

I said there were five principles. Science is one. The second is the cost mechanism. Our approach is simple: we use a market based approach, and that is because we believe that the cost should be borne by the major polluters. Their approach is that the cost should be borne by the taxpayer. Therefore, the difference between the two approaches is simple: theirs is three times more expensive than ours, at least, and it is a $10 billion-plus charge and impost on the taxpayer. On the question of cost, it speaks for itself.

Then we go to the question of effectiveness, the third criteria for examining how you are going to deal with this challenge of climate change. Here again we had some interesting developments overnight in the assessment made of the environmental effectiveness of the plan put forward by the Leader of the Opposition the other day. The net result of the plan put forward by the Leader of the Opposition is not to decrease Australia’s carbon pollution but to increase it by 13 per cent. Those opposite, through any independent and external analysis of what they have put forward, would know it does not come within a bull’s roar of the 138 megatonnes necessary to bring in a five per cent reduction on Australia’s overall emissions target. In fact, the conclusion of the
Department of Climate Change, looking at it generously, is it would generate 40 million tonnes. That is the third factor. No. 1: they reject the science. No. 2: we accept the science.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Prime Minister has now been speaking for over six minutes. If he cannot make his point in four he should sit down.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will resume his seat. As he knows, there is no provision in the standing orders about the length of answers.

Mr Rudd—On the science, the difference is very clear. We accept the science; they reject the science. On the question of cost, they have chosen the most costly scheme and we have chosen the least costly scheme because it is market based. On effectiveness, our approach is simple: we will bring about a five per cent reduction in carbon pollution because we set a cap on pollution. Their scheme has been judged by the independent analysts of the Department of Climate Change as representing not a decrease in carbon pollution but an increase in carbon pollution.

On the question of global responsibility which the honourable Leader of the Opposition just referred to before, the commitments which have been made around the world so far are along the following lines: Japan has committed to a 25 per cent reduction on 1990 levels, the European nations have committed to between 20 and 30 per cent reductions on 1990 levels, the United States has committed to a 17 per cent reduction on 2005 levels, India has committed to reducing emissions intensity by 20 to 25 per cent and China has committed to reduce carbon intensity by 40 to 45 per cent on 2005 levels by 2020.

These are the elements by which you analyse the policy, but it goes back to one thing: do you believe them? The Leader of the Opposition knows that he does not believe that climate change is happening. He said that the planet is in fact getting cooler, not warmer. His shadow environment minister has said today that he is wrong. He has said quite clearly to the parliament today that the Leader of the Opposition has given up. You know something? That is precisely what he has done because he thinks the politics is too rich a minefield to harvest and will leave the policy alone for the long term. The alternatives for Australia’s future are absolutely clear-cut: we stand for policy; you stand for politics.

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr Abbott (2.40 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal report, the climate change mitigation report and his own Treasury documentation, all of which indicate large increases in electricity prices as a result of his emissions trading scheme. So I ask the Prime Minister: what is the increase? Is it the seven per cent that he told this House on Tuesday? Is it the 18 per cent that he admitted yesterday? Is it the 20 per cent which IPART claims? Is it the 25 per cent which Frontier Economics claims? Whatever it is, his great big new tax is a massive slug on Australian families and I call on the Prime Minister to explain himself.

Mr Rudd—I welcome the debate on alternative policies on climate change. In the lengthy question asked by the Leader of the Opposition he referred to a well-known consultancy firm called Frontier Economics. It is interesting to see what Frontier had to say about the scheme put forward by those opposite, because when asked again about this on radio yesterday the well-known Danny Price from Frontier Economics said this: ‘So I am
in favour, ultimately, of a trading scheme.’ That is what Frontier Economics said.

The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, the day before or the day before that Frontier Economics were full backers of his approach. It strikes me as passing strange that the full backers of his approach say that the only way to deal with these challenges in the long term is through a market based system. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: if you are going to invoke an authority like Frontier Economics to justify your position, you get onto the telephone and you ask them, ‘Guys, are you going to back me up?’ because on this occasion they walked away from it at a million miles an hour.

The second part of the question which the honourable Leader of the Opposition asked was about electricity prices. I repeat what I said to him yesterday: price rises would be seven per cent in 2011-12 and 12 per cent in 2012-13. Yesterday, the shadow Treasurer said that there was something remarkably new in this. I draw his attention to a statement which was released by the Minister for Climate Change and Water in November of last year following the negotiations with your side of politics when we agreed on the approach to this. That contained within it precisely the final position vis-a-vis the impact on electricity and gas prices. The prices were put in those terms and at that amount because that was the deal we struck with you. That was contained in the statement and the letter by the minister in November last year and we have been absolutely consistent about that.

The final point I make in response to the Leader of the Opposition is this: through a market based system dealing with the challenge of climate, we have indicated quite plainly what the impact on prices will be. Mr Howard said when he was Prime Minister that if you are going to act on climate change it will have an effect on prices. That is what happens. Here is the difference. This government put forward a proposal which says that if prices are going up we will take the money we get from the biggest polluters in the country and use that to provide compensation to working families so that working families can use that money to invest in other forms of energy efficiency. We provide compensation: 92 per cent of Australian households are provided with compensation. How much is provided by way of compensation by those opposite? A big fat zero. Overall, it is a bit like this: we provide a scheme which is low cost, we provide a scheme which is more effective and we provide a scheme which is totally funded; they provide a scheme which is ineffective, which is high cost and which is totally without any funding detail at all.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I seek leave to table the transcript from which the Prime Minister was quoting, in which Mr Danny Price says that his scheme is almost the worst way to put a trading scheme together.

Leave not granted.

Climate Change

Mr BEVIS (2.45 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change. Why does Australia need to take action on climate change and what is the importance of expert policy advice in developing effective action to reduce carbon emissions?

Mr COMBET—I would like to thank the member for Brisbane for his question. The climate science is very clear and so is the economics, and the fact of the matter is that an emissions trading scheme is the least costly, most economically efficient way of reducing carbon pollution. That conclusion, of course, is based on extensive research and
analysis. There have been major reports, such as the UK’s Stern review, considered internationally. Within Australia, the government of course has had regard to all of the advice available to it, from Treasury to the Department of Climate Change and the work done by Professor Garnaut—reflected, of course, in the government’s green and white papers.

As the Prime Minister indicated earlier, the previous Prime Minister, John Howard, embraced an emissions trading scheme and took it to the last election on the basis of his own extensive report, the Shergold review. The fact of the matter is that the new Leader of the Opposition not only repudiates the science but has abandoned all pretence of sound economics as well. His policy is all dishonest posturing, a pretence and a con job. There was some mention made a couple of moments ago about Mr Danny Price from Frontier Economics. The interesting thing, of course, is that at his press conference releasing this policy the Leader of the Opposition asserted that Frontier supported the policy and said that Frontier thought it was economically and environmentally responsible. But, going through Mr Price’s comments on 2GB, he said, ‘Our reputation is extremely important to us,’ and then went on to say, ‘We’ve never said anything about whether that is more cost effective’—referring to the Liberal Party policy—’than the CPRS, so it has been a very limited review in this case.’ I would not call that a sound endorsement of the policy.

But, worse than that, the Leader of the Opposition has now aligned himself with Margaret Thatcher’s former offsider, Lord Monckton, who we know, of course, to be the champion of climate change sceptics. This is a man who the Leader of the Opposition met last night and who said that the international climate change negotiations are ‘about to impose a communist government on the world’.

Mr Anthony Smith interjecting—

Mr COMBET—You look a bit excitable there, mate. Just relax. Lord Monckton said the climate change negotiations were ‘about to impose a communist government on the world’. Sounds a bit like Senator Minchin, doesn’t it? Lord Monckton also called young climate activists in Copenhagen ‘Hitler Youth’. That is what Lord Monckton had to say. This is the astonishing thing: this guy is even too way out there for Senator Joyce. This is what Senator Joyce, the shadow finance minister, had to say. This is extraordinary:

Obviously I and my constituency have some doubts (about the science) but when you find yourself waltzing with the fringe you should take a step back.

You ought to have a listen to that one, mate. You are way out there.

On the economics, the Leader of the Opposition claims that his policy will reduce emissions by five per cent, and we know that claim to be dishonest; emissions will continue to rise. The Department of Climate Change, as it was reported today, confirms that this is a con job and that emissions are forecast to rise by 13 per cent on year 2000 levels. The advice goes on to say:

The Emissions Reduction Fund is far more complex than has been implied by the Opposition, and certainly more difficult to implement than the CPRS.

It is bad economics, it is bad for the environment and it is a repudiation of the science. Their proposal will cost more and do less, and it is not funded. Any member of this House who accepts the science and respects sound economics will support the legislation that is being debated in this House now. It was accepted by that side of politics less than
10 weeks ago. It is sound public policy. Yours is a farce.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for O’Connor will resume his seat. The minister should refer his remarks through the chair even in climactic conclusions. The member for O’Connor has the call on a point of order.

Mr Tuckey—I wish to ask that the minister tabulate his speech or otherwise have it incorporated in Hansard to save us a bit of time.

The SPEAKER—The member for O’Connor will resume his seat. Was the minister quoting from a document? Was the document confidential?

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask the minister to table the Danny Price transcript from which he was reading.

The SPEAKER—If there is a document that was in the public arena—like a transcript that is not part of a confidential brief—he would have to table. If the minister has not quoted from such a document, I am not empowered to ask him to.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I am seeking clarification. I am trying to do justice to your point of order. You are not being helped by the member for Boothby who misinterpreted what I had said. I am indicating to the minister that if he had quoted from a document which was a public transcript, he would be required to table that document. That is as far as I can go. If he is informing the House that he was quoting from confidential documents, the practice of the House has been that that is the conclusion of the matter.

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr HOCKEY (2.53 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, given that single income people who earn just $45,000 a year are not fully compensated for price increases as a result of your emissions trading scheme, will you now inform the Australian people how much worse off someone earning $45,000 will be?

Mr RUDD—The honourable member will know full well that each family’s income circumstances differ depending on the numbers of children and the arrangements.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—I am about to go to the question that was asked. First and foremost I say to the shadow Treasurer that when it comes to compensation for the government’s proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme all low-income households will receive full assistance. Secondly, I say to the shadow Treasurer that 50 per cent of middle-income households will receive full assistance. Practically all middle-income households will receive some assistance and finally 92 per cent of all households will receive assistance. On average these households will receive about $660 of compensation or be about $60 better off as a result of the CPRS. In the definition of the thresholds of household income, which goes to the actual question that the honourable gentlemen asked, the definition of low household income as far as a single income is concerned is $30,000, for a couple without children it is $45,000, for a couple with children it is $60,000—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order to do with relevance. The Prime Minister was asked a specific question, ‘How much worse off would a single income earner on $45,000 a year be?’ It is a simple question.
The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr RUDD—In response to the shadow Treasurer’s question, first of all what I detailed was the spectrum of the government’s compensation package and, secondly, went to the income thresholds which define first of all low-income earners, medium-income earners and high. Low-income earners are those I just defined, medium single income earners are between $30,000 to $80,000 and between $45,000 to $120,000 for a couple without children—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order to do with relevance. The opposition has listened to your admonition to ask specific questions so that they will not be able to be reinterpreted. The Prime Minister was not asked about the ‘spectrum’ of compensation as he has defined it. He was asked about a single income person on $45,000 a year.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. As I have said before the style of the answer given has listened to your admonition to ask specific questions so that they will not be able to be reinterpreted. The Prime Minister was not asked about the ‘spectrum’ of compensation as he has defined it. He was asked about a single income person on $45,000 a year.

Mr RUDD—As I was saying before the actual thresholds which apply to these levels of compensation go from low through medium to high ranging from $30,000 for a single income earner, medium being $30,000 to $80,000 and high above $80,000. In terms of the actual level of assistance, which goes to the other part of the honourable member’s question, for low-income earners there are 2.9 million households in the country. The average annual price impact is $420 and the average annual assistance will be $610. For middle-income earners there are 3.7 million households. The average annual impact will be $650 and the average annual assistance will be $700. If the honourable member would like further information on these matters, I am sure we could provide it in due course.

Climate Change

Mr DANBY (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Why is the financial framework for tackling climate change crucial and why does the government reject the failed approaches of the past?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for his question. The financial framework underpinning policies to tackle climate change is an extremely important matter, particularly as these are issues that relate to fundamental change in our economy. Such financial frameworks are important with respect to producing the maximum outcomes with minimum cost to taxpayers, minimum impact on the budget and minimum disruption to the Australian economy. Unfortunately, the alternative that has been released this week by the Leader of the Opposition has a very familiar ring about it. There is a grab bag of gimmicks, the giant slush fund for the National Party to hand out to their mates, the lack of teeth—it is all voluntary—all of those things have a very familiar ring to them.

That familiar ring is no coincidence, because, if we look back to the former Howard government and the former Prime Minister, John Howard, before he committed to putting in place an emissions trading scheme, we will see some remarkable similarities between those policies and the policies being advocated by the Leader of the Opposition. I would just like to give a few examples of some of the programs put in place by the Howard government to allegedly address climate change over its time in office. This is by no means an exhaustive list: Local Greenhouse Action, Greenhouse Challenge

Time prevents me from giving you the full list, Mr Speaker, but I would like to draw attention to one remaining John Howard program, and that is the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Program, a grants program that was designed to fund projects and activities that deliver large-scale emissions abatement that would otherwise not occur. Sound familiar? It sounds an awful lot like the $2½ billion crock that is in the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition this week. It is precisely the old John Howard policies.

We are going back to the good old days of ‘Honest John’, except now it is his love child, ‘Phoney Tony’. The script is the same, but it is now ‘Phoney Tony’ instead of ‘Honest John’. The script is: pretend you will do something, hand over bucketloads of money to the National Party to dish out to their mates and not have a serious impact on the problem because it is all voluntary. It is all business as usual according to the opposition’s policies.

We have seen from the Department of Climate Change’s analysis that has been released that the impact on emissions of the proposals put forward by the Leader of the Opposition would be roughly a third of that claimed. So, in other words, if he is to seek to achieve his objective that he allegedly shares with the government—the targets he shares with the government—he would have to increase his spending to somewhere close to treble what he is already committed to, which on his own admission, is an additional $10 billion or so over a 10-year period on top of the $9½ billion he is ripping out of the budget to protect the subsidies for private health insurance for millionaires. This all demonstrates that this is nothing but a giant con job on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. It has little impact on climate change, it involves a massive hit to the budget and it recycles the failed strategies of the past from John Howard.

**Emissions Trading Scheme**

Mr HOCKEY (3.02 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. Given that a police officer and their teacher spouse who each earn $65,000 a year are not fully compensated and are financially worse off under the Prime Minister’s emissions trading scheme, will the Prime Minister inform the House and those families of exactly how much worse off they will be after the introduction of the emissions trading scheme?

Mr RUDD—If I heard the member for North Sydney’s question correctly, he referred to, I think, a double-income family—am I right? Was it with two children?

Mr Hockey—No, a double-income family.

Mr Rudd—Oh, a double-income family.

Could I draw the honourable member’s attention to the following. Under the household assistance package income levels, medium income levels are defined as: single, $30,000 to $80,000; couples with children, $45,000 to $120,000. The medium-income families will have 50 per cent as much as those families who will receive full assistance. As for other households, they will be receiving some assistance.

The second part of my answer to the question is this: as the member for North Sydney knows and as the Leader of the Opposition knows—

*Opposition members interjecting—*
The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume his seat.

Mr Billson—The 9.4 million residential electricity accounts—how does that add up?

The SPEAKER—The member for Dunkley is warned.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. He was asked about a specific example, and he should be able to give a specific answer on specific families and individuals.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Leader of the Opposition has raised a point of order on relevance. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—The Leader of the Opposition refers to families in Australia. There are 8.8 million families in Australia; 8.1 million of them will receive compensation under the government’s proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Secondly, they are divided into three sets of income thresholds, as I have just described before. I have also described to him what the compensation arrangements which apply to middle-income earners are.

Can I say finally to the Leader of the Opposition and to the shadow Treasurer, who asked the question: they know as well as anyone else in this place that each individual’s circumstances vis-a-vis other taxation arrangements which apply to middle-income earners are.

Infrastructure

Mr Bidgood (3.05 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House. Why is the government’s nation-building infrastructure program essential to future productivity and dealing with climate change? Are there any threats to this investment?

Mr Albanese—I thank the member for Dawson for his question. Indeed, I was up in his electorate just a week ago opening one of the projects that we have brought forward as part of the Economic Stimulus Plan. Indeed, we on this side of the House support nation building, and we have ensured that the nation-building program we have established will not only be good for future productivity but also be a part of the action dealing with climate change, because what investment in rail, particularly urban rail, does is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. So we are using a whole-of-government approach to deal with climate change. But, of course, we recognise that you cannot have a piecemeal approach. In order to move to a carbon constrained economy, you need a price signal for the long term, which is why we support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition has repeatedly stated that he wants to cancel the final stage of the Economic Stimulus Plan, and he has labelled the multi-billion-dollar investment in the nation’s road, urban public rail and port infrastructure as ‘low-quality spending’. His finance spokesperson, Senator Joyce, has gone even further, telling Sky News on 10 December:

Well I think the whole … stimulus package was not warranted in the form it went out. I think the stimulus package was inappropriate.

It is pretty clear that they were planning deep cuts to infrastructure spending before this week. But we now know that they have to find money to fund their $10 billion climate change con including $3.2 billion over the forward estimates. What we now know is that not only have the climate sceptics taken over over there, the market sceptics have
taken over over there as well. You wonder where this inspiration comes from. John Howard looked to Menzies for inspiration. We know that Peter Costello looked in the mirror for inspiration. Brendan Nelson looked to the ALP for inspiration. Malcolm Turnbull looked to George Souris for inspiration and now we have the new Leader of the Opposition with his source of inspiration—the mad monk meets Lord Monckton. Both of them denying the science—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat. I indicate to the Manager of Opposition Business that the member for O’Connor beat him by a considerable amount in jumping up and I am obliged to give the call to the member that first rose. The member for O’Connor.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, the 104 issue extends in this case to the capacity of a minister to tell jokes and since Mick Young there has been nobody on that side that can do it. Could he return to the subject?

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister is responding to the question. The member for Sturt.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask the Leader of the House to withdraw his disparaging remark about the Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER—Order! If offence is indicated as being taken, the Leader of the House will withdraw.

Mr ALBANESE—If you are offended I will withdraw. We know that the previous Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, had Godwin Grech. This bloke, Tony Abbott, has Lord Monckton—

The SPEAKER—The minister must refer to members by their titles.

Mr ALBANESE—because his scepticism on climate change would bring him down.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will resume his seat. I have indicated to the minister that he will refer to members by their parliamentary titles. The member for Sturt tries my patience, often. The minister has concluded.

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr TRUSS (3.09 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister about his great big new tax and his proposal to provide fixed levels of compensation based on average price increases, which do not take into account the higher prices paid by regional families for electricity, water, food, groceries, fuel and other essentials. Why does the compensation envisaged overlook the increased costs faced by regional Australian families, particularly those who need to rely on higher costs for heating and cooling their homes in places like Darwin and Launceston?

Mr RUDD—I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. I go first of all to the preface to his question about big taxes. Can I just remind him that the one he is putting forward is three times more expensive than what the government has put forward. Furthermore the opposition’s scheme will cost more than $1,000 per household by 2020 on their current numbers, and can I say to those opposite—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The member for Sturt will withdraw. The member for North Sydney may withdraw as well.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I also said that the Prime Minister lied so I withdraw as well.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The member for Dickson on a point of order.

Mr Dutton—I too withdraw for calling him a liar, Mr Speaker.
The SPEAKER—Order! I indicate to the House that the chair’s patience is well and truly tested and I think that, if they reflect upon general behaviour it is not what those that observe us would expect, and I would ask them to try for the last half of today’s question time. The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think it would assist the House if the Prime Minister did not persist in asserting untruths. If the Prime Minister persists in asserting untruths—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. He has been here long enough to know that, if he has a problem, he can use other forms of the House to address that problem. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was responding to the Leader of the National Party’s question, the first part of which went to big taxes and the second part of which—

Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Minister for Finance and De-regulation has made an offensive remark and I ask him to withdraw.

The SPEAKER—Order! I did not hear the remark but, as there has been an indication that a remark was made that was offensive, I will seek the cooperation of the minister and ask him to withdraw.

Mr Tanner—I withdraw my suggestion that the Leader of the Opposition should take a swing at somebody.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister knows that he must withdraw without reservation.

Mr Tanner—I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Can I say in response to the Leader of the National Party’s question, the first part of which went to the question of big taxes, I simply, as a matter of truth, assert that their proposal costs the taxpayer more than $10 billion—that is what they say. Our proposal costs the taxpayer $3.3 billion. On a matter of fact theirs is three times the cost of the government’s plan.

Mr Truss—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The question is about compensation and the extra cost of heating and cooling in places like Darwin and Launceston.

The SPEAKER—Order! There is no point of order. I hope that the Leader of the National Party, on reflection, will realise that, whether it is on his written script or not, he added words about a description of a tax that have been used during this week. It might have assisted me if I had ruled that part of the question out of order. It is something that I am now considering to make it easier for me as the chair. I indicate to some people that, if they consider the allowances that are made on questions which are outside of the standing orders, they might reflect upon the way they behave in other aspects of question time.

I am in a position where I am trying to implement standing orders that I am on the record as describing in this place, both as Speaker and before being Speaker, as not being a level playing field. If we want to rule out argument and other matter in questions, I am happy to do that. But I think that people should reflect upon what the consequence would be of that. The Prime Minister has the call, he is responding to the question, and I hope that he will be heard in silence.

Mr Rudd—I respond to the Leader of the National Party, whose question did go in two parts: the first was his reference to big
taxes and the second was on the question of compensation arrangements.

I was responding to the first one before: by the opposition’s own admission their proposal would cost the taxpayer more than $10 billion. The government’s proposal is $3.3 billion. By definition, it is three times larger.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—The second point I would make to the Leader of the Opposition, who seems to be getting pretty excited in question time today, is that if they were to be fair dinkum about the actual emissions target then of course the tax burden goes through the absolute roof.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My point is relevance. I note from the Practice that of course you cannot compel ministers to answer questions. However, you can note that, as the Prime Minister has decided not to answer the question, you might invite him to sit down and admit he will not answer it.

The Speaker—I think I have ruled on this aspect when raised by the Leader of the National Party. The Prime Minister is responding to the totality of the question. It may not have been what the Leader of the National Party intended as the main point of his question, but the Prime Minister is responding.

Mr Rudd—If you look at those numbers and how they flow out over the decade, of course, they add up to something equivalent to, or perhaps larger than, $1,000 per family as a taxation burden which would flow from the proposal put forward by the opposition. Of course, the alternative in terms of funding it lies in cutting services, and the Leader of the Opposition refused to rule out cuts to defence and refused to rule out cuts to hospitals and therefore, of course, we have had nothing either on the tax side or the spend side to clarify the whole nature of the big tax position and topic which the Leader of the National Party referred to before.

My next point on the big tax question is about whether the opposition are serious about the abatement task, which is reducing carbon pollution. Today, we have expert analysis from the Department of Climate Change that the overall impact of the scheme put forward by those opposite is to bring out 40 million tonnes reduction in overall carbon pollution. Of course, the target is 138 million tonnes if we are to be serious about a five per cent reduction overall. So, as I have said in response to an earlier question, if they are only going to do 40 million tonnes reduction, that actually results over time in a 13 per cent increase in the overall emissions in the economy. So they end up paying more in their scheme and we still push out more carbon pollution into the future. It does not add up.

But, if they were actually serious about the target of 138 million tonnes worth of greenhouse gas emissions, I am also advised that in fact the tax burden goes beyond $10 billion into multiples beyond that. So I just say to those opposite: if you are putting forward a scheme which does less and costs more you should think very long and hard before you ask questions about other schemes.

Now, on the question of compensation which the Leader of the National Party also referred to, I say to the Leader of the National Party that the compensation regime which we have put forward has been clear on the public record for a long time. It applies to different income categories and it has been the subject of multiple questions in this place. In terms of how the scheme is reviewed over time, once the scheme commences household assistance would continue into the future. Secondly, because these assistance payments are indexed to the CPI,
assistance will automatically increase in line with increasing carbon prices that affect household costs.

I also say that before the scheme commences and indexation begins the government is committed to adjusting the initial level of household assistance if the cost of living impacts are higher than expected. Finally, I say to the Leader of the National Party that the government will also annually review in the budget context the adequacy of assistance to all households, noting that these payments are already automatically increased.

These, and the government’s position on how we approach indexation, are clear on the public record. That is the response to how we would look at future levels of assistance across the country.

Economy

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (3.21 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on recent economic indicators and any risks to the recovery?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Dobell for his question. Data released today provides further encouraging signs of Australia’s continuing economic recovery and evidence of how well the economy has performed in the face of the very strong headwinds that we have felt from the global economy. Today’s retail figures show that retail trade values rose 2.1 per cent through 2009, notwithstanding a modest fall in the month of December. For the December quarter, retail trade volumes rose by a strong 1.1 per cent. This demonstrates the very important role that stimulus has played in giving consumers the confidence to keep spending. We have also received encouraging news about activity in the home-building sector. Total residential building approvals were up 2.2 per cent in December and by 53.3 per cent over 2009. That is the strongest annual growth in almost eight years.

This comes on top of the Access Economics Investment monitor released today, which shows the government’s infrastructure stimulus has helped underpin investment in the economy. Compared with a year ago, there has been a big increase in the value of definite projects now going ahead. Our nation-building investments in schools, roads, rail and ports are a big reason for that improvement. This is what Access Economics had to say:

Significant government investment also played a very strong helping hand, most notably the federal government’s schools upgrade program.

So our infrastructure stimulus has provided a pipeline of projects that will continue to underpin confidence and jobs in the Australian economy. Today’s figures show again why Australians should be confident, though not complacent, about our economic prospects. We are encouraged by the signs that we are seeing that stimulus has worked to support the recovery, but we know that there are challenges ahead.

The biggest threat to this recovery is the threat by those opposite to rip the rug out from under the stimulus. If they had their way they would rip out the stimulus, costing tens of thousands of jobs, fundamentally impacting upon confidence in the economy and threatening the employment of tens of thousands of tradies right around this country. That would simply shatter confidence. On the one hand, those opposite are saying they are going to rip out stimulus. But of course, on the other, they are going round the country making unfunded promises. It has been something like 65 days since the Leader of the Opposition has had the job. In that time he has racked up $10.7 billion over five years in unfunded commitments. That is his record so far. It is pretty breathtaking.
The Leader of the Opposition is bored by economics. We know why he is bored by economics, and that is because he simply does not understand it. He has a shadow Treasurer that is so lazy we have not seen a funded policy produced by those opposite. All of those opposite—but particularly the Leader of the Opposition, particularly the shadow Treasurer and particularly the shadow finance minister—live in fantasy land. They believe in magic puddings. They think you can spend more, lower tax and have a lower deficit. That is their magic pudding. It is no wonder the shadow Treasurer is wandering around waving magic wands and wrapping himself in tutus. It is fantasy land. The Leader of the Opposition is going around dressed like Borat and the shadow finance minister is living in the Stone Age—Barnaby Rubble, getting out his rock abacus and embarrassing himself at the National Press Club.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Treasurer should refer to people by their proper titles and withdraw that disparaging remark about our colleague in the Senate.

The SPEAKER—Order! Offence having been indicated, the Treasurer will withdraw to assist the House and will also refer to members of both houses by their titles.

Mr SWAN—I withdraw, Mr Speaker, and I will conclude with these words. It is no wonder, after four leaders in a few years, four leaders in just over two years, what a divided rabble the opposition are. With three shadow treasurers in two years, it is no wonder their economic credibility is a smoking ruin.

Aged Care

Mr DUTTON (3.27 pm)—My question is to the acting Minister for Health and Ageing. Minister, given that there is no compensation for small businesses under the government’s emissions trading scheme, by how much will aged-care operators have to increase their residents’ fees because of higher operating costs?

Mrs ELLIOT—I thank the honourable member for his question and particularly for raising issues in relation to the CPRS, which is always a good chance to highlight the opposition’s climate con job. When it comes to their plan, we certainly know it does not work. I am very pleased to be here talking about our record funding when it comes to nursing homes. I would like to outline how we are building a modern aged-care system for Australia, with more services for older Australians, more funding—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has the call.

Mrs ELLIOT—Thank you, Mr Speaker. We are meeting the challenges of our ageing population also by improving the quality of our aged-care workforce with major investment. I am very pleased the member for Dickson has asked a question particularly in relation to aged care. When the opposition leader was the minister for health, he ripped a whole billion dollars out of the health and hospital system. He was the Minister for Health and Ageing for a period of four years in which he underfunded both health and aged care.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order—and reluctantly so, as I am stopping the minister in full stride. The question was about the costs and whether those costs would be passed on to older residents in nursing homes and how much it would be as a result of this big new tax.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson will resume his seat. The point of order is on the matter of relevance. The minister will relate her material to the question.
Mrs ELLIOT—I have already outlined many, many faults with your plans and I have also highlighted our funding arrangements. Also, it has been fully outlined that compensation is available. Can I finalise my comments by saying that the Leader of the Opposition, the former Minister for Health and Ageing, ripped a billion dollars out of the health and aged-care sector. By standing up in this place and making comments in relation to the future of our aged-care system, the member for Dickson highlights his sheer audacity and the extremely inefficient job the Leader of the Opposition did when he was the Minister for Health and Ageing.

Building the Education Revolution

Ms PARKE (3.30 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on recent public commentary about the Building the Education Revolution program?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Fremantle for her question. I know that she supports the improvements in her local schools. She has asked me about recent commentary about the Building the Education Revolution program. It is very simple to summarise: parents, teachers and students love it and the opposition hate it. Unbelievably, on Lateline the shadow minister for finance, Senator Barnaby Joyce, when talking about our Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, of which Building the Education Revolution is a major part, said:

What did it deliver us? Give me one outcome that the Labor Party stimulus delivered us?

He went on to describe himself as an accountant not fascinated by numbers, so he is going to fit right in with an opposition led by an erratic and volatile man not interested in economics. When we come to the numbers that Barnaby Joyce has missed, they actually tell a story—the numbers about the growth in our economy which meant that this nation stayed out of recession; the numbers about the employment in our economy that show that we supported jobs and continue to support jobs at a crucial time. Senator Barnaby Joyce must have missed the following numbers under the Building the Education Revolution program: 24,009 infrastructure projects are due in our schools, including 10,656 projects in 7,961 primary schools under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program.

Senator Barnaby Joyce’s crime is not just ignoring these numbers—if he was just ignoring these numbers then he would be foolish; of course, it is more than that. On Lateline when he was asked about how the opposition is going to finance its climate change con job, he said:

... look at the money squandered on their school halls.

Senator Barnaby Joyce, confirming proof positive that in order to finance the climate change con job put together by the climate change sceptic who now leads the opposition, the target for their savings will be stopping money being delivered to schools under the Building the Education Revolution program. I think that the opposition need to think about the reaction of school communities to being told that the climate change con job is going to be financed by their local school having money due to it ripped out. I can see some very pale faces on the back-bench of the opposition now as they think about explaining that to their local school communities.

How would they explain it? How would they explain it to people like Peter Shaw, who is the principal of St Mary’s College, who said about the Building the Education Revolution: ‘This building program will in-
crease the opportunities for our students to gain skills for local employment and increase their ability to access a career of choice—getting skills for life and work, something that could be stopped in order to finance the climate change con job! What would they say to Rob Wannon, the chairman of the council of the Knox Grammar School, who said: ‘As one of the aims of the scheme is to stimulate the economy through employment, you would be happy to know that our project has already led to the employment of over 20 businesses involved in the design of the new facilities and will shortly result in the employment of over 100 construction personnel.’

Mr Hockey—How much does Knox get?

Ms Gillard—I thank the shadow Treasurer for confirming his opposition to expenditure on the Knox school. Maybe he would like to explain to the 100 workers who are being supported by that project why he does not think they deserve a job and why he does not think their families deserve to have a breadwinner in their family. It is quite clear from the reaction of the opposition that they value so little expenditure on schools that it is the obvious target for ripping out money to finance their climate change con job. That is the cost to Australian families and Australian school students.

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr Abbott—(3.36 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that an individual earning over $80,000 a year receives no compensation under your emissions trading scheme, can you inform the House how much worse off a senior classroom teacher in New South Wales earning $81,656 a year will be under your great big new tax, your $114 billion money-go-round?

Mr Rudd—The Leader of the Opposition’s question is in two parts. It is about compensation on the one hand and about big taxes on the other. If I could just refer briefly to the second part of his observation first, it goes to the size of the tax he is proposing—$10 billion in terms of the cost to the taxpayer. We are also advised that if they were to actually be serious about their target of five per cent, the cost to the taxpayer, wait for it, would rise to $27 billion. Can I say to those opposite that this is an extraordinary exchange when they talk about taxes, and we have a scheme from them which in overall terms costs more, does less and is totally unfunded.

The second part of the honourable member’s question goes to compensation. He refers to the compensation schedule that we have put forward. I note in passing they offer not a dollar of the compensation to any working family anywhere in the country. The household categories are as I described before; the compensation regimes are as I described before as well. For the individuals concerned, and for all those who are going to be affected by the introduction of an emissions trading scheme, I simply go to the point that the cost of living impact as advised to the government by the Treasury is 1.1 per cent. That will flow through to households. What we have for low- and middle-income households is a compensation regime. That is clear; the cost impact has been identified by the government as well, and that is equally clear.

Economy

Ms Annette Ellis—(3.38 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Why is accuracy in commitments and commentary regarding the public finances important to maintaining confidence in the Australian economy?

Mr Tanner—I thank the member for Canberra for her question. It is important to maintain—
Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. A question about commentary is clearly outside the standing orders. This question is clearly out of order and the minister should not be allowed to answer it.

The SPEAKER—The question asked about the importance of public confidence.

Mr Abbott—Commentary.

The SPEAKER—I believe the question then asked about the importance to public policy of accurate commentary. As I heard it I ruled the question in order. I asked the minister to come forward. I take it that there is some concern about the question but, as I heard it, it was in order.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I also rise on a point of order. There is another objection to this question, besides the fact that it is about commentary. The minister has absolutely no responsibility for anybody else’s comments about these matters. He therefore has no right to be commenting on somebody else’s comments in the way the question invites. Perhaps the question could be re-worded and asked again, but it should not be asked in the form it has been asked. We are happy to ask our next question and we can come back to this when it has been reworded.

The SPEAKER—I have ruled that the question as I heard it was in order. Very similar questions have been asked, I believe even earlier in this question time.

Mr Tanner—I again thank the member for Canberra for her question. It is important that we have clear and precise commitments and indeed commentary with respect to the public finances in order to maintain public confidence. Unfortunately we are getting exactly the opposite from the new opposition leader and the new, fourth in this term, shadow finance minister. The opposition says that the deficits projected in the budget as a result of the global financial crisis are too big and the debt that is commensurate with that is too high. But they continue to block major savings initiatives in the Senate such as the private health insurance rebate reforms which would save $9½ billion over the next 10 years, and of course they have made huge new spending commitments in their con job on climate change. Those spending commitments are in fact much larger than the opposition understand because, if they are to meet the target they have identified, according to Department of Climate Change calculations they would have to spend almost three times the amount of money that they are projecting. They would have to spend approximately $27 billion over that 10-year period, not the $10 billion that they concede. So there is a giant $27 billion hole in their budget calculations on top of the $9½ billion dollars that they are already blocking in the budget savings that the government has put forward. It is no wonder that the shadow Treasurer, the member for North Sydney, suggested that the Leader of the Opposition’s approach to climate change might cost as much as $50 billion, and it is no wonder it was repudiated by the former Leader of the Opposition.

It is interesting that these days the primary advocate for the opposition on economic policy issues appears not to be the shadow Treasurer; it seems to be shadow finance minister, Senator Barnaby Joyce. He has had a lot of interesting things to say. I know from long personal experience that it is not easy to get a front-page headline, to be the lead story on the front page of a major newspaper, when you are shadow finance minister. Senator Joyce has managed that several times.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order relating to relevance. I ask you to bring him back to the question.

The SPEAKER—The minister will relate the material that he is using to the question.
Having allowed the question to stand, I ask him to relate his answer to the question.

Mr TANNER—Mr Speaker, I was referring to a headline on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* today, which refers to ‘a day of gaffes goofs and gibberish.’

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I again rise on a point of order.

The SPEAKER—Order! I simply say to the Manager of Opposition Business that I will listen closely to the remarks that the minister is making, having indicated that he should relate his remarks to the question.

Mr TANNER—I will do that, Mr Speaker. I was asked about the importance of accuracy on statements and commitments regarding public finances. In the one speech yesterday, the new shadow finance minister managed to confuse ‘millions’ with ‘billions’ several times when describing the size of the budget. He managed to claim that the $6 billion that was left in the Higher Education Endowment Fund by the former government was all gone, when in fact the successor fund established by the government with those funds had in its accounts as at 31 December 2009, you guessed it, $6 billion. He claimed that debt would peak at $315 billion, when in fact the projected net debt peak is $153 billion. He claimed that current government debt was $120 billion, when the most recent announced level, of November, was $11 billion net debt. He claimed that Australian Public Service growth was out of control under Labor, when in fact in the two years of this government being in office it has increased by 2.1 per cent—most of that Defence personnel—and in the last two years of the Howard government it increased by 9.3 per cent.

The shadow minister for finance is busily churning out all of these one-liners—and distancing himself from the Leader of the Opposition meeting Lord Monckton, which I noticed with interest—but his comments are contradicting everything that the Liberal Party does and says. This is on top of his statements prior to parliament resuming. He was open to examining the government’s proposals on the private health insurance means test. That was repudiated by the Leader of the Opposition. He was opposed to the Chinese investing in the CSR spin-off company, and the Leader of the Opposition distanced himself from that. He said that the Productivity Commission had watered down its report on executive pay, and the Leader of the Opposition distanced himself from that statement. He said that company tax should be reduced, and the shadow Treasurer—what is left of him—said that that was not opposition policy. He said that Peter Spencer, the farmer who was on a hunger strike, should be compensated and then later repudiated that himself and said that, no, that should not happen.

But, of course, the most incredible statement—and the one that really did impact on public confidence—was his suggestion that the US and Australian state governments might default on their debts, that there was a possibility of ‘economic Armageddon’ and that ‘our capacity to feed ourselves and the capacity to provide the fundamentals in medicines and basic fundamental requirements for our nation’ were somehow in doubt. And he strapped on a sandwich board and was running up and down and saying, ‘The end of the world is nigh’. This is not a shadow finance minister; it is a freak show! It is the bearded lady of Australian politics. And he has taken charge of opposition economic policy!

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask the minister to withdraw the offensive words about the shadow minister for finance contained in the last few statements he made. They are quite clearly offensive.
The SPEAKER—The minister will withdraw and will draw his answer to a conclusion.

Mr TANNER—I withdraw. The sad thing for this country is that now virtually everything we hear from the opposition with respect to public finances, economic policy, debt, budget and how the promises are going to be paid for by the opposition is coming from Senator Barnaby Joyce. If he ever gets control of the public finances of this nation, God help Australia!

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER
Parliamentary Computing Network

The SPEAKER (3.48 pm)—Yesterday, the member for North Sydney asked me a question related to the parliamentary computing network. The parliamentary computing network operating system uses Internet Explorer version 6 and Adobe PDF reader version 7. That operating system is being progressively upgraded, with some users already on the newer versions. At the request of the Presiding Officers Information Technology Advisory Group, POITAG, last year, it was agreed that, to avoid any disruption, the upgrade of members’ and senators’ offices would be postponed until after the pending federal election.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Unfortunately, at the time, the consequences of that delay on product versions such as Explorer and Adobe reader were not considered. I will actually depart from my written script. If members have some concern about the operation of POITAG, I invite them to speak to their colleagues on POITAG.

The upgrade of Internet Explorer has now been scheduled to be completed by the middle of this month. The upgrade of Adobe reader is currently being planned, with implementation in March once testing for compatibility with other parliamentary computing network products, such as ParlInfo, is complete. Any problems or questions about the parliamentary computing network can be referred to the help desk.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will leave the chamber for one hour.

The member for North Sydney then left the chamber.

Mr Lindsay—Mr Speaker, if—

The SPEAKER—The member for Herbert will resume his seat. I can assure members of the House that I could not give a continental what they think of me as an individual, but I would have hoped that the position of chair could attract some degree of respect. I find it amazing that, in giving a considered answer about matters to do with the administration of this place, the chair was subjected to interjections and the matter has led to this sort of behaviour. If the honourable member for Herbert is seeking, as I hope, to add and assist the chair, because he was present at the meetings of POITAG, I will give him indulgence.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (3.52 pm)—Mr Speaker, this will assist the House. The reason that POITAG made the decision that you correctly advised us of was that DPS were proposing to move members’ offices to Vista. Members of the POITAG did not want the parliament to move to Vista. We wanted to move directly to Windows 7 and the staff said that was possible. We also did not want disruption to our parliamentary computing network in an election year. That was the reason that we will now move directly to Windows 7, the latest operating system, in the parliament.
The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Herbert.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS
Report No. 21 of 2009-10

The SPEAKER (3.53 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 21 of 2009-10 entitled Administration of the Water Smart Australia Program—Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts; National Water Commission.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.53 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members earlier today. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:
Department of the Treasury—National interest statement: Loan agreement between the Australian Government and the Republic of Indonesia for a standby loan for the Australian dollar equivalent of US$1 billion, 5 November 2009.

Debate (on motion by Mr Pyne) adjourned.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME) BILL 2009

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate’s amendments—

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 5), omit “Part 6”, substitute “Parts 6 and 7”.
(2) Schedule 1, item 5, page 3 (line 23), omit “must”, substitute “may”.
(3) Schedule 1, item 5, page 5 (after line 19), after subsection 20A(3), insert:

Legal expenses

(3A) Without limiting the manner and circumstances that may be specified in an order under paragraph (1)(b), the court may order that specified property may be disposed of or otherwise dealt with for the purposes of meeting a person’s reasonable legal expenses arising from an application under this Act.

(3B) The court may make an order under subsection (3A) despite anything in section 24.

(3C) The court may require that a costs assessor certify that legal expenses have been properly incurred before permitting the payment of expenses from the disposal of any property covered by an order under subsection (3A) and may make any further or ancillary orders it considers appropriate.

(4) Schedule 1, item 5, page 5 (after line 25), after subsection 20A(4), insert:

(4A) If the court refuses to make a *restraining order under subsection (1), it may make any order as to costs it considers appropriate, including costs on an indemnity basis.

(5) Schedule 1, item 5, page 5 (line 27), omit “must”, substitute “may”.

CHAMBER
(6) Schedule 1, item 12, page 7 (after line 33), at the end of section 45A, add:

(4) If a *restraining order ceases under subsection (1) or (2), the court may, on application by a person with an *interest in the property covered by the restraining order, make any order as to costs it considers appropriate, including costs on an indemnity basis.

(7) Schedule 1, item 13, page 8 (line 14), omit “must”, substitute “may”.

(8) Schedule 1, item 13, page 9 (line 32), omit “so.”, substitute “so; or”.

(9) Schedule 1, item 13, page 9 (after line 32), at the end of subsection 179C(5), add:

(c) it is otherwise in the interests of justice to do so.

(10) Schedule 1, item 13, page 10 (line 23), omit “must”, substitute “may”.

(11) Schedule 1, item 13, page 11 (after line 24), after section 179E, insert:

179EA Refusal to make an order for failure to give undertaking

(1) The court may refuse to make a *preliminary unexplained wealth order or an *unexplained wealth order if the Commonwealth refuses or fails to give the court an appropriate undertaking with respect to the payment of damages or costs, or both, for the making and operation of the order.

(2) The *DPP may give such an undertaking on behalf of the Commonwealth.

179EB Costs

If the court refuses to make a *preliminary unexplained wealth order or an *unexplained wealth order, it may make any order as to costs it considers appropriate, including costs on an indemnity basis.

(12) Schedule 1, item 13, page 17 (after line 18), after section 179S, insert:

179SA Legal expenses

(1) If the court considers that it is appropriate to do so, it may order that the whole, or a specified part, of specified property covered by an order under subsection 179S(1) is not available to satisfy the *unexplained wealth order and may instead be disposed of or otherwise dealt with for the purposes of meeting a person’s reasonable legal expenses arising from an application under this Act.

(2) The court may require that a costs assessor certify that legal expenses have been properly incurred before permitting the payment of expenses from the disposal of any property covered by an order under subsection (1) and may make any further or ancillary orders it considers appropriate.

(13) Schedule 1, item 13, page 17 (after line 33), at the end of the Part, add:

Division 5—Oversight

179U Parliamentary supervision

(1) The operation of this Part and section 20A is subject to the oversight of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission (the *Committee).

(2) The Committee may require the Australian Crime Commission, the Australian Federal Police, the *DPP or any other federal agency or authority that is the recipient of any material disclosed as the result of the operation of this Part to appear before it from time to time to give evidence.

(14) Schedule 2, item 3, page 31 (lines 7 to 17), omit section 15J, substitute:

15J Service of freezing order etc. on financial institution and account-holder

(1) If a magistrate makes a *freezing order relating to an *account with a *financial institution, the applicant for the order must cause the things described in subsection (2) to be given to:

(a) the financial institution; and

(b) each person in whose name the account is held.
(2) The things are as follows:
   (a) a copy of the order (or of a form of the order under section 15E);
   (b) a written statement of the name and contact details of the "enforcement agency mentioned in the paragraph of the definition of authorised officer in section 338 that describes the applicant.

Note: If the copy of the order is given to the financial institution after the end of the first working day after the order is made, the order does not come into force: see subsection 15N(1).

(15) Schedule 2, item 3, page 34 (after line 27), at the end of Part 2-1A, add:

Division 6—Revoking freezing orders

15R Application to revoke a freezing order

(1) A person may apply to a magistrate to revoke a "freezing order.

(2) The applicant for the revocation must give written notice of the application and the grounds on which the revocation is sought to the "enforcement agency mentioned in the paragraph of the definition of authorised officer in section 338 that describes the "authorised officer who applied for the "freezing order.

(3) One or more of the following may adduce additional material to the magistrate relating to the application to revoke the "freezing order:
   (a) the "authorised officer who applied for the freezing order;
   (b) the authorised officer whose affidavit supported the application for the freezing order;
   (c) another authorised officer described in the paragraph of the definition of authorised officer in section 338 that describes the authorised officer mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b) of this subsection.

(4) The magistrate may revoke the "freezing order if satisfied that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

15S Notice of revocation of a freezing order

(1) If a "freezing order relating to an "account with a "financial institution is revoked under section 15R, an "authorised officer (the notifying officer) described in the paragraph of the definition of authorised officer in section 338 that describes the authorised officer who applied for the freezing order must cause written notice of the revocation to be given to:
   (a) the financial institution; and
   (b) each person in whose name the account is held.

(2) However, the notifying officer need not give notice to the applicant for the revocation.

(3) Subsection (1) does not require more than one "authorised officer to cause notice of the revocation to be given.

(16) Schedule 2, page 51 (after line 19), at the end of the Schedule, add:

Part 7—Other amendments

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

106 Subsection 42(5)

Repeal the subsection, substitute:

(5) The court may revoke the "restraining order if satisfied that:
   (a) there are no grounds on which to make the order at the time of considering the application to revoke the order; or
   (b) it is otherwise in the interests of justice to do so.

107 Application and transitional

(1) The amendment of section 42 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 made by this Part applies in relation to the revocation of a restraining order on or after commencement, whether the application for that revocation was
made before, on or after commencement.

(2) If an application under section 42 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 for the revocation of a restraining order has been made but not determined as at commencement:

(a) the applicant may vary the application to take account of paragraph 42(5)(b) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 as in force at commencement; and

(b) if the application is varied under paragraph (a) of this subitem—the applicant must give a copy of the application as varied, and written notice of any additional grounds that he or she proposes to rely on in seeking that revocation, to the DPP and the Official Trustee; and

(c) the DPP may adduce additional material to the court relating to those additional grounds.

(3) In this item:

commencement means the commencement of this item.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (3.56 pm)—I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I will just make some very brief remarks and indicate my appreciation to the opposition. This bill and the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Serious and Organised Crime) Bill (No. 2) 2009, including as amended by the House and the Senate, address the threat of serious and organised crime groups, which we know to be increasingly aggressive, entrepreneurial and adaptive. The legislation represents a significant step as part of a coordinated national effort to more effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute organised crime activities and to improve law that targets the proceeds of organised crime groups.

I would like to acknowledge the constructive discussions that were held with the opposition, specifically the shadow Attorney-General, during consideration of this important legislation and I thank the opposition for their support for these very important bills. I also note that the opposition proposed a number of amendments to the first of the two bills and these have been accepted by the government. I would also like to thank the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for its consideration of the bills. The bills demonstrate the government’s commitment to decisive action to address the threat of organised crime and to ensure that there are no safe havens in Australia for organised crime groups.

Question agreed to.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME) BILL (No. 2) 2009

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate’s amendments—

(1) Schedule 1, Part 5, page 40 (after line 30), at the end of the Part, add:

158A Subparagraph 266A(1)(a)(i)

Omit “39(1)(d)”, substitute “39(1)(ca), (d) or (da)”.

(2) Schedule 1, page 51 (after line 11), after item 200, insert:

200A Subsection 298(1)

Omit “in a particular financial year”.

(3) Schedule 1, item 207, page 52 (line 22), omit “or subparagraph 102(d)(ii)”, substitute “or subparagraph 102(d)(ii) or section 179L”.

(4) Schedule 2, item 16, page 65 (line 23), at the end of subsection 3L(1), add “if he or she suspects on reasonable grounds that the data constitutes evidential material”.

(5) Schedule 4, item 1, page 100 (after line 19), after subsection 390.3(3), insert:
The fault element for paragraphs (1)(c) and (2)(d) is intention (by the first person).

(6) Schedule 4, item 1, page 101 (lines 6 to 28), omit paragraphs 390.3(6)(d) to (f), substitute:

(d) the association is only for the purpose of providing legal advice or legal representation in connection with judicial or administrative proceedings under a law of the Commonwealth, a State, a Territory or a foreign country; or

(e) the association is reasonable in the circumstances.

(7) Schedule 4, item 1, page 101 (after line 30), after subsection 390.3(6), insert:

(6A) Paragraphs (6)(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) do not limit one another.

(8) Schedule 4, item 1, page 101 (line 32), omit “under subsection (1)”, substitute “against subsection (1) or (2)”.

(9) Schedule 4, item 1, page 101 (line 34), omit “under subsection (1)”, substitute “against subsection (1) or (2)”.

(10) Schedule 7, item 18, page 127 (line 2), omit “ACC”, substitute “examiner”.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (3.56 pm)—I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I rely on the remarks I made on the immediately preceding bill.

Question agreed to.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Rudd Government

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

The failure of the Government to keep its election promises to families, small business and pensioners

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

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

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (3.57 pm)—If anyone were to go back and read Labor’s policy documents from before the last election, they would wonder if this government had any relationship whatsoever to the people who wrote those policy documents. Remember some of the famous statements before the election? Remember the campaign declaration: ‘This reckless spending must stop’? The government then goes out on an extravaganza of reckless spending not seen since the days of Whitlam, in fact probably even worse than the days of Whitlam. We have unbalanced budgets. We have a debt for future generations to pay that has already run to at least $120 billion.

Remember Labor’s TV ads? Remember the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, looking the camera in the eye and saying, ‘I am an economic conservative. I am committed to balancing the budget.’ Before the election, Kevin Rudd was saying, ‘I am an economic conservative.’ Well, Labor’s first budget has produced a $27.1 billion deficit—double the highest deficit ever previously recorded in Australia. Their 2009-10 budget predicts a record $58 billion deficit. Net public debt is to blow out to $315 billion. This is the government that said that they were economic conservatives and that the reckless spending would end. The promise was broken. That, of course, is not the only promise that was broken.
What was perhaps the flagship election promise of the Labor Party was the promise that they would deliver fibre-to-the-node broadband with speeds of 100 megabits per second to 98 per cent of Australians, beginning by Christmas 2008, at a cost of $4.7 billion. Not one element of that promise has been delivered. We are past Christmas 2009, and not a single home has been connected to Labor’s high-speed broadband. Labor axed the $900 million OPEL contract, which would have been delivering fast broadband speeds to most Australians by now. Now, they have reworked the promise. It is not 98 per cent of people anymore; it is only 90 per cent that will ever get fibre to the home. Two million Australians, mainly in regional areas, have been left out altogether. If you live in a town of under a thousand people, you do not count anymore and you have been excluded from Labor’s promise. And once more, the cost has blown out from $4.7 billion to $43 billion. Not a single house has been connected and there is no plan—no business plan, no idea how it could ever possibly be developed—another broken promise.

Do you remember when Labor said they would give a computer to every secondary school student in years nine to 12? Well, that promise is now that there is only a computer available for every second child—and only then if the state government or the parents pay for the electricity, the programs, the cables, the repairs and the upgrades. It is another promise clearly broken. Remember Labor promising that they would reduce the costs paid to consultancies by $395 million? What has actually happened? Labor paid $952 million in consultancy contracts in its first two years—more than any other government in history—another broken promise. Labor said that they would provide an extra $15 million for rural research and development corporations affected by the drought. In the end, they provided $10 million, but that was for climate change activities—another broken promise.

Remember Labor promising that they would fix the hospital system? Labor was going to fix the hospitals. They would give the states until mid-high school in the country. It is another broken promise.

Remember how Labor said they were going to establish GroceryWatch to bring down the price of groceries, so people would have to pay less? Now, after spending $13 million on a whole series of failed GroceryWatch reporting schemes, Labor have abandoned it altogether. Today’s newspapers report the litany of increased grocery prices, showing this government has failed again to deliver on one of its election promises. What about Fuelwatch? That was going to help motorists buy the cheapest petrol. Not long after, Labor abandoned that promise as well—another broken promise.

Let us go right back to the very beginning. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister said that the parliament would resume before Christmas and ministers would not be allowed a Christmas holiday break. Well, the ministers all had their Christmas holiday break and parliament did not start until mid-February 2008. It is one of the latest beginnings to parliament ever recorded—another broken promise. Labor said, ‘We will establish an office for children and young people.’ But there is no sign of that office—another broken promise.

Remember Labor promising that they would give a computer to every secondary school student in years nine to 12? Well, that promise is now that there is only a computer available for every second child—and only then if the state government or the parents pay for the electricity, the programs, the cables, the repairs and the upgrades. It is another promise clearly broken. Remember Labor said they would deliver an education revolution? But literacy and numeracy standards are falling. What about the promise that Labor would provide a trade training centre at all 2,650 secondary schools in Australia? ‘A trade training centre for every school’—that was the promise. But now it is a trade training centre for a cluster of schools, a cluster of towns; not for every...
2009 to fix the hospitals or the government would have a constitutional referendum to transfer responsibility for health to the Commonwealth. Mid-2009 has come and gone, and all Labor is proposing is a review of the last review. No action—another broken promise. People still wait in the hospital queues to get basic treatment. Bills are not being paid at country hospitals. The butcher will not deliver the meat. The veterinary surgeons have to provide the bandages in some of these places. Labor has taken no action. This is a tragic broken promise for all Australians.

What about their other big flagship program—Labor's modern award system? No workers or employers would be worse off under this new industrial relations system with the utopian goal of making all workers better off and all employers better off. Well, it has failed dismally. Almost all employers are worse off; and so are many employees. In fact, in Queensland, so many employees are worse off that the state government has delayed for a year introducing the system rather than reduce wages for so many Australians—another clear broken promise.

Labor also said that they would have a particular relationship with the unions, and so industrial relations would improve—there would be fewer strikes. Strikes increased sixfold within months of the election of the Labor government. Under their new award scheme, hardly a day passes when there is not news of more industrial action and outrageous demands. A small shipping company just a few days ago had to agree to $50,000 an employee increase in wages just to stop another strike at a vital time.

Labor said that they would maintain and improve the Regional Partnerships program, but they axed it within days of coming to office and replaced it with their own scheme—a Better Regions program—but only promises made by Labor candidates qualify for assistance under this program. No-one else can even apply. There are no application forms for anyone else. All of it is going to fund Labor election promises. They said they were going to have a new era of clean and open government—another broken promise. It is a litany of broken promises. The parliamentary secretary, who now has responsibility for the regional development network, might like to reflect on Labor's promises to keep the area consultative committees—another broken promise. They have all been abolished.

Let's move into other areas. Remember Labor's promise to take legal action to stop Japanese whaling. No legal action has been taken—another election promise broken. What about the promise to establish 35 general practice superclinics to improve local medical care? After two years in office there is only one superclinic in operation. Remember their promise to hold a referendum with the 2010 federal election for four-year terms for members of the House of Representatives and the Senate? The Prime Minister personally abandoned that promise on 28 January this year when he said there would be no referendum.

Also remember Labor's promises to the Aboriginal people. Labor said they would deliver 750 new homes, rebuild 230 houses and refurbish 2,500 dwellings in the Northern Territory. They have spent $45 million and they have not built a single house. It is another broken Labor promise. What about the promise Mr Rudd made that he would update the House of Representatives on the progress towards closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage on the first sitting day of each parliamentary year? On the first sitting day of each parliamentary year he was going to report on the progress made on Indigenous disadvantage. He did not do it on the first day of parliamentary sittings in 2009 and he
has not done it this week either—another broken promise. I guess he had to break that promise because there is nothing to report on this government’s progress in addressing disadvantage for the Aboriginal people. It is another broken promise. The Aboriginal people have been let down like all other Australians.

Let’s also look at Labor’s promise to spend $100 million to re-engineer Menindee Lakes to save 200 billion litres of water a year for the Murray-Darling. It has not been done; it has not happened. It has not even started. The Labor government broke their promise.

Dr Kelly—How much water did you put into the Murray?

Mr TRUSS—It is another broken promise. Labor broke their promise. Don’t you have any honesty at all? These promises seemingly mean nothing to the parliamentary secretary. Labor said they will establish a coastguard. The member for Brisbane said it often. I notice he is in the House and he would recall it. He said that they would have purpose-built vessels and dedicated trained staff. Well, the member for Brisbane’s coastguard promise was abandoned within days of the election. There is no coastguard at all and there have been cutbacks in Customs and Quarantine, so there is less capability for them to do their job to help keep our borders secure.

Labor said, ‘We will create the right incentives for individuals and businesses,’ Right from their first budget cuts they gutted $1 billion from business incentives, including axing the Commercial Ready program, the Small Business Field Officers program, the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, the Global Opportunities Program and many more. They are broken promises. Labor said, ‘We will increase the overall size of the Australian Federal Police by 500 sworn officers.’

The fact is that they are only proposing 100 officers be recruited between 2008 and 2010. On top of that they have slashed the AFP’s budget and wound back the air marshals program. Remember one of the other classic promises, in writing, to the health insurance industry: ‘We will retain the private health insurance rebate.’ It is a quite clear and unequivocal promise. Yet Labor, time and time again, come into the House seeking to reduce the rebates to thousands of Australians.

Let’s remember one of Prime Minister Rudd’s other famous promises, ‘We will end the blame game.’ Did you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in the first 500 questions without notice in this parliament following the election of the Labor government Labor ministers blamed the coalition for their problems in 77 per cent of their answers? In 81 per cent of the questions from Labor members, the dorothy dixers, they blamed someone else. The blame game developed new life under this government. It is another set of broken promises.

So that is Labor’s record. Before the election there were many promises and one by one they were broken. There is no honesty, no credibility. Is it any wonder when the Prime Minister makes other commitments—to aged Australians, to people with disadvantage—and gives his carefully drafted and brilliantly crafted speeches that, frankly, no one listens and no-one believes? You cannot break promise after promise and still expect people to believe you. You cannot make flamboyant comments about your vision of the future for the country when your record is a litany of broken promises: a failure to deliver, a failure to be honest with the Australian people and a failure to take any account whatsoever of the firm commitments that the government made when asking to be elected by the Australian people a little over two years ago.
It has been a record of broken promises, statements made, gullible voters believing and Australian people being let down. They are being let down by a government who have broken perhaps the most fundamental promise of all: the one that the Prime Minister made on election night. I will always remember the Prime Minister’s election night commitment that he would govern for all Australians. He may be governing for all Australians but if you live in the regions, if you pay tax, if you work, if you eat, if you drive, if you go to school, if you use electricity, if you care about the environment or if you are sick, then that promise does not cover you either. You are not one of the Australians whose interests this government has promised to govern for. The government have neglected the Australian people and broken their promises day after day, time after time, and they can never be trusted. (Time expired)

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (4.14 pm)—I have been sitting here and thinking that I must be in another universe, a very different universe, given this selective shopping list and this supposed litany of failure. We have just heard from the Leader of the Nationals, someone I have enjoyed having some discussions with in the corridors. I just checked and found that he had been a minister for 10 years, with I think some 14 months as transport minister. He must be excruciatingly embarrassed in private moments when he reflects on what was not done for regional Australia, if we just take that point, during the Howard government’s time in office.

I compare that with the record investment in infrastructure projects right across the country and the $1 billion in community infrastructure, and this is money that is going directly from the Commonwealth to every council right across Australia—565 councils—for projects identified not by any of us sitting here in Canberra but by shire presidents, mayors and deputy mayors across the country. I know the Leader of the Nationals will be aware of these projects because he will have heard firsthand of the enthusiasm and the thanks and the gratitude coming from local government in his area and across the country. I know he would know that because he is indeed a leader who is in touch with his constituency. He would also know about the enthusiasm that comes from many on his own side of politics.

There is a conservative National Party leader who has been prepared to be absolutely upfront about the unique collaborative arrangement and the partnership that has now been forged with the federal government. I am talking about Brendon Grylls, my colleague in Western Australia. I say to the Leader of the Nationals, as it is very interesting, that I was in Perth last week for meetings with the new Regional Development Australia network. We had an induction session for the new chairs and deputy chairs, and my Western Australian colleague Brendon Grylls was there. Was there any complaint about the ACCs that have been wound up? Not a murmur. There was an embracing of the new system that has been set up, Regional Development Australia, because, I say to the Leader of the Nationals, your colleague in Western Australia is acutely aware of the record investment that is going into Western Australia at every level—investment in roads, rails and ports, in regional centres, in helping that state develop the next wave of spectacular prosperity. I have to say that the very good group of chairs and deputy chairs that gathered in Perth last week is absolutely on board in wanting to work with us on regional road maps and to bring that information to Canberra. In fact, a regional network forum will be held here in March this year,
and I do hope the Leader of the Nationals will be attending that—

Mr Truss—I hope you’ll invite me.

Ms McKEW—You will most certainly be invited. I look forward to your contribution and I know that you are going to hear that people certainly feel that there is a different level of engagement and they are looking forward to identifying the Commonwealth programs that will help them with both the economic and the social prosperity in their regions.

To go to the specific content of this matter of public importance, I do think it takes a bit of front to suggest that this government has not been supportive of families, of small business operators and indeed of pensioners. We have, importantly, kept the economy strong and supported Australian jobs, small businesses and working families through the global recession. As a result we have national unemployment at 5.5 per cent. This is an astonishing achievement. I see the member for Berowra in the chamber today. He would know that in our area of northern Sydney the figure is even lower than that—about four per cent, 4.2 per cent. It has everything to do with our management of the economy over the past year and everything to do with the money that went into the stimulus, and that has kept Australians working.

I am very glad that the Leader of the Nationals has seen fit to put this forward. When I think of failure to deliver for families, for small business people and for pensioners, my thoughts also go to a matter that would concern him a great deal, particularly in relation to small business people and pensioners travelling on the section of the Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Curra in his own electorate of Wide Bay. We know well the words of the Leader of the Nationals when it comes to this particular stretch of the road.

The Leader of the Nationals has been quoted several times as saying he travels the highway regularly, with his heart in his mouth. He says:

I’m always pleased when I turn off … you never feel completely safe on that road.

He has also called it a ‘dreadfully accident-prone section, rated the worst piece of the highway in Australia’. Yet, for all his expressed concern, what did the member for Wide Bay deliver for his electorate during his 12 years in office? By the way, this was during the boom years, the years of plenty. The member for Wide Bay spent 10 years as a minister and 14 months as transport minister, and I am very pleased to say that the Rudd Labor government is a very different government to the one that the member for Wide Bay was part of.

Work started on the Cooroy to Curra section of the Bruce Highway in September last year. We were committed to getting works underway quickly and to provide certainty for those families and the small business operators and pensioners that you have talked about. The upgrade will not only improve safety on this stretch of road; it will create—this is what the opposition does not want to listen to—some 650 direct jobs and a further 1,000 indirect jobs. It is a great boost to Queensland’s regional economy.

We chose the eastern alignment option because it was outside the footprint of the proposed Traveston dam, its total cost was estimated at $613 million and work could commence in September last year. That is part of a record $2.6 billion investment to improve the Bruce Highway. Yet, as is apparent, the member for Wide Bay has little regard for families, for small business people and for pensioners. He has such little regard that after the May budget he tried to run a bit of a scare campaign, telling his electorate:
The money announced by the government … is to construct a section of the Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Curra which is to be flooded by the Traveston Crossing Dam.

This is not true. The eastern alignment had been agreed but he was still scaremongering. Late last year the member for Wide Bay changed his mind again. Now he was saying, ‘The existing alignment would have been shorter and cheaper.’ That was not true. The western alignment would have meant further delay and higher costs as a decision on the Traveston dam was needed before work could start. It is pretty obvious: you would not want to build a highway that would be flooded. Its cost was $646 million. That is $33 million more than the selected option.

Rather than further delay this important project after 12 years of inaction, the Rudd Labor government decided to move forward quickly and to provide certainty for local communities—for the families, for the small business operators and for the pensioners for whom you are so concerned. Work is underway and taxpayers are going to see value for money.

There are commitments that the government were elected to fulfil but which the opposition still refuses to let us fulfil because of its obstructionist behaviour in the Senate.

Mr Truss—Like on private health insurance.

Ms McKEW—I will come to that. I am very happy to come to that question. I am talking for the moment, of course, about our commitment to climate change. We all know that the opposition leader holds unreconstructed extremist views on a range of topics. The whole country knows exactly what the Leader of the Opposition thinks about climate change. I think his hesitant and unconvincing responses whenever he is asked about the science of this tells us everything we need to know. The opposition leader has confirmed that this week by coming out with what we know is a con job of a climate policy—a policy which will cost more, which does less and which is unfunded. We have said since day one that there are three problems with the opposition leader’s climate con job: firstly, it slugs taxpayers instead of big polluters; secondly, it does not reduce emissions; and, thirdly, it is unfunded.

On Tuesday it was confirmed in the Liberals’ own figures that this con job would cost taxpayers three times more than the CPRS over the next 10 years. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition refused to rule out cutting funding to hospitals and defence to pay for the unfunded $10 billion climate con job. Today it has been confirmed by experts in the Department of Climate Change that rather than reducing emissions this policy will actually increase them. What an extraordinary climate change policy: it will increase emissions. Rather than achieve what we want—that is, a minimum five per cent emissions reduction target—the Liberal climate con job will see emissions increase by 13 per cent from year 2000 levels. That means that taxpayers—families, business operators and pensioners—will be slugged with a $10 billion tax bill for a policy that will actually see emissions increase. What a policy. It is a joke. Only someone as perverse as the opposition leader could construe that as taking action on climate change. I think it has now been put beyond any doubt that the $10 billion climate con job costs more, does less and will mean increased taxes or a massive cut to services. What services will be cut?

So there are commitments that the Rudd government wants to honour that are being blocked by a perverse, extremist position taken by the opposition. In May 2009 the Rudd government chose to delay the start of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme by one year, until July 2011, to help Australian
companies manage the impacts of the global recession. This was an economically responsible decision to take as Australian businesses were dealing with the worst global recession since the Great Depression. Despite the delayed start date, the signal for businesses to invest and start planning for a low-carbon economy was still clear. Unfortunately, the sceptics—led by the opposition leader—have taken over the Liberal Party and have dumped their election commitment to emissions trading. This was a commitment that was taken to the election by the previous Prime Minister, John Howard. It came late, but it was there. The Rudd government remains committed to the introduction of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme as action on climate change is in Australia’s national interest. We must begin the switch to a clean, greener economy. That is essential. So we have reintroduced the legislation to the parliament this week and we encourage all senators to support action on climate change.

Let me come to some other areas where we are helping families and businesses. The Rudd government is committed to delivering a trades training centre to every secondary school across the country by 2018. That program is on track. It is a $2½ billion commitment and allows every school an amount between $500,000 and $1½ million for their centre.

Mr Anthony Smith—At every school?

Ms McKEW—I would welcome a visit by the member for Casey to my electorate. He can come to Bennelong and I will take him to Epping Boys High School. They are just about to start work on their trades training centre. They got their application in in the first round and it was approved.

Mr Anthony Smith—How many laptops have they got?

Ms McKEW—I will come to the issue of laptops. That is very interesting. If you have a spare moment, I would welcome the member for Casey to come up and visit Epping Boys High School. Principal Peter Garrard will be more than happy to show you the construction work that is going on up there. They have their program in place already. In fact I have another story about Epping Boys High School. Like so many members, last year I went to year 12 graduations at the end of the school year. For the first time last year Epping Boys High School, which is one of the most competitive high schools in my electorate, was able to hold that event at the school—(Time expired)

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (4.29 pm)—The member for Bennelong told us in her first breath she thinks she is on another planet. By that remark, she showed she thinks she is still at the ABC where you have a licence to tell as many fibs as you like or distort the truth. Again, this was a challenge—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! The member for O’Connor is sailing close to the wind.

Mr TUCKEY—I am practised at sailing close to the wind, Madam Deputy Speaker. This was a challenge not only—

Consideration interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being 4.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Stirling Electorate: Community Safety

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (4.30 pm)—Crime prevention and community safety are issues of great importance in every electorate; however, they are particularly important in my own electorate of Stirling. I have always done whatever I can to get the federal government involved in reducing crime within my local community. I am pleased to
report to the House on one of the successes that we have had to date. I have been very fortunate to work alongside the City of Stirling in our efforts to address assault, hooning and vandalism across the Stirling electorate. In November 2008, I was very proud to help deliver to the City of Stirling their safer suburbs plan. The plan was developed in conjunction with the Department of the Attorney General, my office and the City of Stirling. It involved the implementation of 14 community safety measures over 12 months. These included additional community safety patrols and officers to increase the existing services while monitoring and deterring antisocial activity in known hotspots throughout the city. The Mayor of the City of Stirling, Councillor David Boothman, was instrumental in helping secure funding, and I congratulate him and the other councillors for their efforts and contribution.

The safer suburbs initiative aims to improve safety and security in the area by reducing the amount of preventable crimes through a variety of initiatives. Now just over one year in operation, the plan has been a very great success. The program has overseen the operation of closed-circuit TV cameras across the electorate and delivered a large-screen monitor to track vehicles and to improve response times using GPS technology. Public amenities have been improved and damage to council property has been significantly reduced. Beach patrol vehicles for police as well as beach inspectors and security patrols are now patrolling Stirling’s beaches, deterring inappropriate behaviour and enhancing the beach-going experience for Stirling residents and for others who visit our wonderful beaches.

The security of the local community, including the security of our seniors, has been significantly enhanced across the electorate. The safer suburbs plan was launched with three clear objectives: to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour citywide; to increase the perception that Stirling is a safe place for both residents and business operators to work in and to live in; and to enhance the availability and quality of evidence available to police to identify and prosecute offences as they occur. I am confident that the plan has done all of this and more.

A recent example of this success was on display during the New Year’s Eve festivities within the Stirling beach precincts. In the past, New Year’s activities at Scarborough beach in particular have been marked by antisocial behaviour and hooliganism. This year, thanks to the efforts of Operation Aquila, an initiative delivered through the safer suburbs plan, the New Year’s Eve festivities went off without a hitch. That is a great testament to the police and to the council involved in this particular operation. The operation included extra vehicle patrols at the precinct, including local residential streets, ATV patrols of the beach itself, monitoring of the CCTV system funded by the former coalition government, road closures along the Esplanade and electronic roadside messages. The night was a huge success for revellers and was an excellent example of the community working together to deliver safer suburbs. Special mention must be made of the Scarborough police officers and the City of Stirling rangers who work tirelessly to make nights like New Year’s Eve and more recently Australia Day safe occasions for the community.

I would point out the success of the CCTV system installed throughout Stirling which the coalition government funded to the tune of $85,000 and which is monitored as part of the safer suburbs plan. The system has helped make our community safer for the elderly, families and all residents of the electorate—and, most importantly, it has made it easier for police to catch criminals. The CCTV system has allowed local police to use
footage of crimes as evidence in order to identify and prosecute people who are doing the wrong thing. Not only has this ensured more arrests have been made but also it has deterred people from committing crimes or engaging in bad behaviour in the first instance. Again, the CCTV network has proved to be a very successful safety initiative delivered under the safer suburbs plan.

The City of Stirling has joined me in exploring ways to tackle the scourge of graffiti across the electorate. I joined the City of Stirling’s fight against graffiti, along with some of my state colleagues, by participating in the volunteer graffiti reduction program, which aims to educate volunteers and offenders in the true cost of graffiti. We all attended the program where we learned how to deal with graffiti. I congratulate the City of Stirling on this initiative. (Time expired)

Sri Lanka

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (4.35 pm)—Today is the 62nd anniversary of Independence Day in Sri Lanka. However, the Tamils on the island will not be celebrating—indeed, the Tamil diaspora around the world mourn as they believe today marks the beginning of national oppression. On 4 February 1948, when independence was granted by the British government, arrangements were not made to secure political stability through a power-sharing agreement between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. Due to this failing, the minority Tamil community were repeatedly discriminated against and brutally oppressed. The Tamils sought non-violent means of action, engaging in political campaigning for federalism through constitutional and parliamentary means. However, the Tamil community report that the vocalisation of their desire for self-determination led to a violent reaction from the Sri Lankan government resulting in a bloody 26-year civil war.

On 18 May, the government declared victory with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam. The end of the war resulted in some 300,000 internally displaced persons being forced into government camps. Heavy military artillery and shelling obliterated homes and schools as well as hospitals. In a United Nations report, it is estimated that in the last stages of the civil war 20,000 Tamil civilians were killed, mostly through shelling; 7,000 civilians were killed in the so-called no-fire zone up to the end of April, despite assurances from the Sri Lankan government that they had stopped the use of heavy weapons. On average, a thousand civilians died each day until 19 May 2009.

Despite the Sri Lankan government’s declaration of victory, the international community has expressed its grave concern that this battle will not be won and peace will not prevail until the Sri Lankan government provides essential political reform. Unfortunately, the recent re-election of the Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, has not instilled confidence in a secure future for all Sri Lankans. On the contrary, the Tamil community I represent have raised their serious concerns that the elections were not conducted in good faith. Rather, they believe the elections were brought forward two years to exploit the Sinhala majority in order to gain another six-year term. Further, the Tamil community believes that the voting trend highlights the alarming polarisation between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, noting that the majority of Tamil-speaking people voted against re-elected President Rajapaksa.

A UNICEF representative presented a report on the current situation in Sri Lanka to senators and members in this House this morning. He confirmed that many Tamils were unable to register to vote at the recent elections. The opposition presidential candidate, General Sarath Fonseka, has also alleged that there were serious violations of
The current political and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka is extremely disturbing. Despite a commitment from the Sri Lankan government to resettle all of the 300,000 internally displaced persons by 31 January this year, the UNICEF representative noted that this has not happened and will be unlikely to occur in the next couple of months. While many people will celebrate Independence Day today in Sri Lanka as I speak, some 90,000 internally displaced persons remain in government camps unable to return to their homes. Landmines and unexploded ordnances are making vast regions too dangerous to access. Others have no homes to return to as they have been destroyed by shelling. Alarmingy, it was also reported by the UNICEF representative this morning that there are currently no mother and child health clinics, no paediatric care and no obstetric services available in the affected areas. While Australian children have just begun their school year, returning to improved or improving learning environments due to federal government funding, many schools in northern Sri Lanka have been reduced to rubble. It is reported that every school that was not destroyed or severely damaged does not have furniture or teaching resources.

The trauma suffered by the men, women and children in northern Sri Lanka, which they continue to experience, is nothing short of horrific. The Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations has continued to raise its request for an independent investigation into the conduct of all parties during the war.

On 16 January this year, in Dublin, the Chairman of the Permanent People’s Tribunal, Francois Houtart, delivered the preliminary findings of its two-day hearing in Milan on the war and its aftermath. Evidence including video footage and eyewitness accounts was presented during the hearing. The people’s tribunal found that the Sri Lankan government was guilty of war crimes and guilty of crimes against humanity.

Previously in this House I have called for an independent and thorough international investigation into the reports of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Sri Lanka. On the 62nd anniversary of Independence Day in Sri Lanka, I repeat that call for an independent investigation, led by the United Nations, and I demand that the Sri Lankan government cooperate fully with that investigation.

Workplace Relations

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (4.40 pm)—On 19 March 2008 the Deputy Prime Minister did an interview with Kieran Gilbert on PM Agenda. The Deputy Prime Minister was asked:

The opposition has asked you to guarantee that no worker will be worse off, that no worker would be worse off under your system. Are you able to give that guarantee or is that too difficult?

Her response was:

I am certainly able to guarantee that under the bill that passed the parliament today, Labor’s new laws, workers will not be disadvantaged by Labor’s new laws they will be substantially better off.

She continued:

… no working Australian will any longer have to fear walking into a workplace and be confronted by an Australian Workplace Agreement that rips away a basic safety net condition.

The interviewer then asked:

So no group of workers will be worse off?

She continued:

Our bill today is about making people better off, and it will, and I can give the guarantee that no worker, from the bill we have passed today into Australian law, will be worse off.
It is my melancholy duty to inform the Deputy Prime Minister that that statement is not quite true. I have been inundated with calls from a range of workers who are meter readers with the Spotless Group. Many are from my electorate. An email that was sent from Wayne Platter at Spotless to a range of Energex executives says:

Guys, we need to make sure all staff are aware that, due to the implementation of the modern award as of 1 January, the majority of employees have incurred a reduction in their take-home pay. Please reiterate these changes verbally to all employees. The loss of allowance payments in regard to laundry allowance, 27 cents a day, and an all purpose allowance, $48.95, are the contributing factors.

It continues:

Please impress upon employees that Spotless did not implement this modern award. This is a government issue.

The issue at play is that these meter readers were previously on a meter reading employees award—state 2005 and they were level 3 senior meter readers. They earned $694.20 a week and allowances of $19.95. It is 35 grand a year, which is not a lot of money. They have now moved onto the electrical power industry award 2010, where they have been rated at level 1, admin grade 1, at $563 a week. That new award loses all allowances. They are $130 a week worse off in pay and $20 worse off in allowances. These are people earning $35,000 a year. I acknowledge that point A.3.5 in the award has a series whereby the reductions kick in. On 1 July 2010 that loss of $130 can only be 80 per cent of the loss. Therefore, they will be $26 worse off on 1 July, plus the 20 bucks of allowances. On 1 July, they will be $46 worse off because of this new award that they have been put on after the Deputy Prime Minister said on national TV:

Our bill today is about making people better off, and it will, and I can give the guarantee that no worker, from the bill we have passed today into Australian law, will be worse off.

May I suggest to this House that the Deputy Prime Minister’s guarantee is not worth the paper it is printed on, it is not worth the speech it was delivered from and it is not worth the television time that she presented it on, because all of the meter readers who work with Spotless and are employed with Energex have right now lost the $20 allowance and, as of 1 July, they will be $46 worse off and, as of 1 July 2011, they will be over $70 worse off. It is an absolute and utter disgrace and I demand that the Deputy Prime Minister holds true to her guarantee and protects these underpaid workers who are being ripped off by a Labor government that simply does not hear and does not care.

**Illawarra: Project Kickstart**

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (4.44 pm)—On several occasions in parliament I have taken the opportunity to raise the issue of youth unemployment and what can be done in a practical way to address the matter and specifically how, in our region of the Illawarra, we can encourage local employers to provide our young people with apprenticeship opportunities.

For the past several years I have chaired a local Illawarra apprenticeship committee which has been able to shine a light on our local challenges. Our research showed that many small to medium sized businesses found the financial cost of taking on a young person prohibitive in the first couple of years when they were still learning their trade. We have been able through the project to get the support of the state government in arranging pre-apprenticeship courses through our local TAFE colleges. In this way, employers who took on a young person at the completion of this course were employing the equivalent of a first year trained apprentice. We have been
successful in placing over 400 young people through this innovative project.

The former federal government funded the apprenticeship coordinator position currently held by Ian Nicholls and auspiced by our local Illawarra Business Chamber. The recent federal government decision to provide an enhanced Apprentice Kickstart Bonus was the impetus for my approach to the editor of our local newspaper, the Illawarra Mercury, to see what assistance the Mercury could provide in publicising this important initiative. This resulted in our committee, in conjunction with our local paper, the Mercury, running a joint local campaign since 19 December last year under the banner ‘Project Kickstart’. An editorial on that day explained the features of the campaign:

Our aim, in concert with the Government, is to find places for 500 apprentices before March next year. Project Kickstart is extraordinarily ambitious, yet it goes to the heart of one of the greatest challenges the Illawarra faces.

With unemployment dancing around 10 per cent we are by definition a disadvantaged region. But on closer examination the jobless numbers reveal a much more horrendous rate of 30 per cent for those people up to the age of 19 searching for work. Combined with a relatively low school retention rate, a clear picture emerges of where this community needs to be giving serious focus.

For weeks after the launch of the campaign, the Mercury ran stories of local young people looking for an apprenticeship—people like Michael Brajkovic, Dale Baker, Dimitar Klimoski, Benjamin Coulstock, Logan Hartley—and several stories of committed employers, like Geoff Bailey from Jamberoo Native Nursery, who were keen to take on a young person. This culminated in a front-page story featuring a local young person, Tim Bonanno, who was employed as an apprentice by Matt Cahill from Wollongong Collision Repairs.

Under the banner headline ‘Our campaign: give a kid a go’ the Mercury ran a special edition of their regular supplement My Career on Wednesday, 20 January. It featured the portraits of about 120 young people and a short statement from them indicating their reasons for wanting an apprenticeship and the areas that they were interested in. In the words of the editor: ‘We appeal to the region’s businesses to make a real difference to the lives of these kids. It’s time to give them a go.’

Our committee met last Friday to review the progress of the campaign, and early figures show how successful it has been to date. By mid-January this year, 236 young 15- to 19-year-olds had commenced their apprenticeship. Our TAFE representatives at the meeting reported an increase of up to 30 per cent in some popular apprenticeship courses like bakery and hairdressing. I am confident we are going to reach our target of 500, and hopefully more, by the beginning of March 2010.

I take this opportunity to thank the editor of the Mercury, Stuart Howie, and all the Mercury staff who have been involved in one way or another in this innovative community based campaign. It is a fantastic example of how we can use our local media to address and find solutions to local challenges facing our community. It is certainly the best organised community campaign that I have been involved with in my time as the member for Throsby. It makes you feel good to know you have made a difference in some small way to the life chances of young people in our region—hopefully 500 or more of them by the end of this campaign.

Cowan Electorate: Type 1 Diabetes

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (4.49 pm)—I take this opportunity to thank the editor of the Mercury, Stuart Howie, and all the Mercury staff who have been involved in one way or another in this innovative community based campaign. It is a fantastic example of how we can use our local media to address and find solutions to local challenges facing our community. It is certainly the best organised community campaign that I have been involved with in my time as the member for Throsby. It makes you feel good to know you have made a difference in some small way to the life chances of young people in our region—hopefully 500 or more of them by the end of this campaign.

Cowan Electorate: Type 1 Diabetes

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (4.49 pm)—I take this opportunity to speak of my concern for those of my constituents who are afflicted with the insidious disease type 1 diabetes. As
a father there is nothing more important to me than the health and safety of my children. I would of course do anything I could for them. I am grateful therefore that they do not have any problems or health concerns. Although my wider family has had our fair share of health concerns over the years, that has not been the case for my children, nor for my niece or nephews. I am very happy about that. It is of course the nature of being an elected representative that constituents who are not so fortunate bring to us their circumstances. As a father and with my feelings regarding my own children, it is not hard to empathise with parents of sick children. Recently I had two visits by mothers whose children have type 1 diabetes.

As I found out, the cause of type 1 or juvenile diabetes, also known as insulin dependent diabetes mellitus, is unknown. The pancreas of a person with IDDM does not make any insulin at all. Without insulin, the glucose remains in the bloodstream at high levels. The body recognises the dilemma and tries to provide the cells with other sources of fuel, such as stored fats. Extensive fat burning can release by-products called ketones, which are dangerous in high amounts. The cause is unknown, as is a cure.

What can be achieved is management including self-monitoring of the blood sugar levels, testing of urine to test high levels of ketones and, of course, injecting insulin. When Raelene Dewar came to see me with her young daughter Madison, they showed me the insulin pump device that their private health insurance paid for. That was $8,500 well spent. Madison programs in what she eats together with information on her blood sugar levels. The pump then delivers insulin directly through a cannular, also known as a set. Testing of Madison is done by Raelene Dewar or her husband at 10.30 pm before going to bed and again at 3 am.

That is the typical life of families whose child is a type 1 diabetic. It is a family burden because they do not want to lose their son or daughter to the disease and they do not want their child to suffer from the range of outcomes of unmanaged diabetes such as cardiovascular disease, a wide range of nerve related and circulation problems and even damage to the retina, which can result in blindness. Given the risks involved, the family members will get up in the middle of the night to do the checks and either go back to bed if the levels are okay or remain up to do more checks or to take the action required.

Alexis Scott told me of her teenage son and how she would have to check his blood every night at 10 pm, midnight and 3 am as a minimum. It could be as often as every 20 minutes if his levels were bad. Management of diabetes is often harder to control when he is sick. She said that the two ways of testing are through the unreliable urine testing and by ketone blood strips. Each box costs $24 and she thinks they should be on the PBS. The target range is five to 10 mmol per litre. If the ketone level is too high, they have to take insulin or risk kidney damage. If the reading is too low, they have to have carbs, such as bread or milk, or death could follow.

The high-maintenance nature of her son’s illness has resulted in a lack of understanding by at least one teacher at his high school. The teacher suggested that his diabetes could be managed just by eating properly, showing that she did not understand the difference between type 1 and type 2 diabetes. She also raised the issues of the disposal of needles by diabetics at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, and the policy of having no sugar at the cafeteria or shop, which makes it difficult for those with an emergency.

These points help with our insight into the life of those with type 1 diabetes. This is not a normal life, but it is for those who have to
live with type 1 diabetes in the family. These families pray or hope for a cure to the disease or the discovery of a treatment that will restore normalcy to their lives. They want their lives back but, above all, they want to know that their child will be safe and able to enjoy their life. I said before that I had empathy for these families, but I cannot know what it is like to have to live their lives. I do, however, appreciate that, but for providence, it could have been my children or any of our children that became the victims of this insidious disease.

It is also important to remember that type 1 diabetes is beyond the control of the victim. It is not about bad eating or a lack of physical activity. They do not really know how it is caused. There has been some suggestion that breastfeeding a child for more than three months can be a factor in reducing the incidence of the disease. What is clear is that research is needed, and while progress is being made I would certainly urge the NHMRC to strongly focus on type 1 diabetes and do all that can be done to solve this great mystery. (Time expired)

**Australian Hospital Ship Centaur**

Mr SULLIVAN (Longman) (4.54 pm)—At 2.50 am on 10 January this year, the first photographic images emerged from the seabed off Moreton Island verifying what we all knew to be true—that is, that the shipwreck identified by sonar on 20 December last year was indeed the Australian Hospital Ship Centaur. Nearly 67 years after her sinking on 14 May 1943, the final resting place of the ship and of the 268 souls who perished is finally known with certainty. Poignantly, amongst the images collected from the ocean floor is one of a perfectly preserved Australian Army slouch hat. Centaur lies 30 miles due east of Moreton Island, at 27 degrees 16.98 minutes south, and 153 degrees 59.22 minutes east, at a depth of 2,059 metres.

The search for Centaur was directed by David Mearns of Blue Water Recoveries, the team responsible for locating the wreck of the Australian warship HMAS Sydney off the coast of Western Australia in March 2008. I note that Mearns paid tribute to Centaur navigator and survivor Gordon Rippon, whose information on position and course shortly before the sinking greatly simplified the search. The search vessel was Defence Maritime Services’ MV Seahorse Spirit. DMS are a major port service and support craft contractor to the Australian Navy and the Seahorse Spirit is used extensively in recruit training. The sonar images collected by Williamson and Associates during the search phase of the operation had identified a single target meeting the search parameters. It was at this site, on 10 January, that the ROV operated by Phoenix International captured the images showing conclusively that this was indeed the wreck of the AHS Centaur.

On 12 January the ROV placed a memorial plaque prepared by the 2/3 AHS Centaur Association Inc. on the foredeck of Centaur. The search for the final resting place of the Centaur was made possible by $4 million of joint funding from the Rudd Labor government and Queensland’s Bligh Labor government, but it came after nearly a decade of urging by the association on behalf of the survivors and their families, and descendants of those who lost their lives when Centaur was torpedoed.

Shortly after my election in December 2007 I was alerted by a constituent to the work of the association and began communicating with its secretary, Jan Thomas, then doing what I could do to advance the goal of the association, including raising the matter in this parliament on the 65th anniversary of the Centaur sinking, calling for the search to be initiated. Jan Thomas is a remarkable woman with many achievements, achieve-
ments for which she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2009. Jan’s role in the formation of the 2/3 AHS Centaur Association and her continuing role as the association’s secretary was certainly at the heart of her nomination for that honour. At the time, she told her local newspaper that she was absolutely overwhelmed to receive the accolade. However, I also recall her words on the ABC’s The 7.30 Report, telling of a childhood dream of going to Brisbane to find her father, who as a six-year-old child she was certain had not died. Sixty-six years later, Jan went to Brisbane and did find her father, Dr Hindmarsh, and I suspect that that may have pleased her more than her OAM, an accolade she had not sought. I feel very privileged to have met Jan Thomas and to have played some part, however small, in assisting her with the realisation not only of her dream but of the dreams of many hundreds of descendants of those aboard Centaur at the time of her sinking.

I am grateful also to Jan for introducing me to survivor Martin Pash, an interesting man with whom I was able to have a long conversation about the sinking of Centaur and of the 36 hours survivors spent afloat on makeshift rafts, awaiting rescue. I know that I am not the only member of this parliament to have advocated on behalf of the 2/3 AHS Centaur Association. I know that at least one serving member has a relative amongst those who perished. I know that they will be similarly pleased at the identification of the Centaur’s final resting place.

The Centaur has a protection zone of 200 hectares around it, under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976. There are also major commemorations being planned following the discovery of Centaur, the first of which will be a service of thanksgiving and remembrance which will be held at St John’s Cathedral in Brisbane on 2 March. A further ceremony for relatives is proposed to be conducted at sea at a later date. I note also that a commemoratory service is to be held at the Centaur Public School at Banora Point, in the electorate of my colleague the member for Richmond, tomorrow week. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend because of commitments in my own electorate. However, the naming of the school itself is a commemoration of the sacrifice made by those who lost their lives aboard the Centaur: members of the Merchant Navy, the 2nd/12th Field Regiment and the medical corps doctors and nurses. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being 5 pm, the debate is interrupted.

**House adjourned at 5.00 pm**

**NOTICES**

The following notice was given:

Mr Bradbury to move:
That the House:

(1) takes note of the 50th anniversary of the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA);

(2) recognises the important role of the RBA in Australia’s economic policy direction; and

(3) reaffirms its support for the independence of the RBA.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Victorian Bushfires

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (9.30 am)—I rise to speak this morning on the last sitting day prior to the first anniversary of the horrific Victorian bushfires. On 7 February last year all of us were shocked at the scale of the devastation. I was born in Melbourne, have lived all my life in Melbourne and now live with my family on the edge of the Yarra Valley, and when we saw mushroom clouds of smoke late in the afternoon we all knew that it could only mean one thing. Immediate thoughts went to Ash Wednesday, the last worst reference point for a bushfire. Of course, as difficult as it is to compare, in so many ways it was worse.

Mr Deputy Speaker Schultz, as you know from the region you represent, in times like this we are shocked at the tragedy, feel sorrow for those devastated by it and are united in our grief but simultaneously we are in awe of the community spirit that is on display in every corner of our community. It is fashionable in some quarters of the media and amongst some commentators to despair at the decline of the community spirit in Australia over recent decades, but sad events like this prove that that is a pessimistic outlook and that the sense of community that has built our local towns and this great country is indeed alive and well, and you see it on display in bucketloads, as we did almost a year ago during those fires.

As all of us in this House said at that time, the rebuilding will take many, many years. We are almost a year on and there is so much to do, but I pay tribute to the spirit of those who worked so hard during the fire and to the spirit of those who have been so affected.

Hindmarsh Electorate: Water

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.33 am)—South Australians have been desperate for improvements to the water situation in the coastal waters of Gulf St Vincent, in the diversity of supply of fresh water to metropolitan Adelaide and in the supply of fresh water to the ecological jewels of the River Murray and adjacent wetlands for a long time—not just for the last couple of years but for years and years. This summer we have seen good progress in and around my electorate of Hindmarsh in South Australia, which we have not seen for many years.

I had the pleasure of attending the turning of the tap with the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Penny Wong, in Adelaide during early January, when we opened the Glenelg waste water treatment plant to the Adelaide Park Lands pipeline, funded to the tune of $30 million by the Rudd Labor government. It will supply billions of litres of recycled water for use between the bay at Glenelg in my electorate and the city. Along the way it will feed off to water many parklands, school ovals and the Richmond football oval, which is the great ground of the famous West Adelaide Football Club in my electorate. The Unley Council will also partly use the water.

As I said, of course much of the credit should go to the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong; the Mayor of the City of West Torrens, Mr John Trainer, and his council, who have been advocating for this pipeline for a very, very long time; and of course
the South Australian government for making this a reality. We have seen the funding commitment from this Rudd Labor government for the Adelaide airport stormwater project as well and the state department of transport concept plans for an aquifer storage and recovery and wetlands scheme being drawn up for the Oaklands Park, which is just upstream from my electorate along the Sturt River. Such projects are valuable for the fresh water they make available for use, offsetting fresh water taken from the River Murray; but they are also valuable for their contribution towards the other great environmental water challenges we face along Adelaide’s coastline and along the western border of my electorate, which is the Gulf St Vincent, such as the survival of marine flora and fauna, the health of our fish stocks and the reduction of coastal erosion.

Similarly we all welcome the great influx of water that we will soon have flushed down the River Murray and into our lower lakes, giving added protection from the acid sulphate soils that continue to threaten an ecological disaster. In January 2010 we saw not only the South Australian government’s pledge of 170 billion litres of water for the lower lakes reaffirmed but also the announcement of an additional 168 billion litres of water secured for the benefit of the lower lakes, which will flow to the lakes in around March of this year. (Time expired)

Higher Education

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (9.36 am)—I rise to raise my concerns about the absolute mess that has been created by this government’s attempt to change the system of student income support. It is really with a sense of sorrow, frustration and disappointment rather than anger that I raise my concerns here today. I honestly believe that this House can do better on behalf of students right across regional Australia. This issue dates back to May last year when the minister announced, without any warning, retrospective changes to the way students on their gap year would be treated by the government in the future consideration of student income support. The great concern at that time was that the students themselves had done nothing wrong; they had taken the advice of their careers counsellors, Centrelink officers, principals and teachers. Really they were the meat in the sandwich in the proposal put forward by the minister at the time.

What followed was a great outpouring of concern from students, with many petitions tabled here in the parliament and letters of concern raised by parents, teachers and the students themselves. Eventually the minister relented to some extent and made some accommodation for the gap year students. But the bill before the chamber last year still kept those elements of retrospectivity which were of great concern to the opposition and also unacceptable to the minor parties in the Senate. We ended the parliamentary year with uncertainty and great confusion. The minister has not taken the opportunity over the summer break or in this first week of parliament to fix the mess. What has been done is that the government has taken out advertisements in daily newspapers warning students that the legislation may change and that there is no certainty whatsoever as they begin their university year. They really cannot start planning for the rest of their lives until they know what this minister is prepared to do in terms of student income support.

Without wishing to get ahead of ourselves, I would like to encourage the minister to look at splitting the bill. There is strong support amongst the opposition and the minor parties for many of the non-controversial aspects of this bill. I have always acknowledged that there was room for improvement in the previous system and have spoken positively in this place, in my
electorate and in letters to students in my electorate about the new income thresholds. There is support for these because they will widen the opportunity for students to attend university. There are also additional scholarships that have been proposed by the minister. So there is support for those aspects of the bill. Those non-controversial aspects of the bill, dare I say it, would probably get a red-carpet ride through the parliament if the minister was fair dinkum about looking to support students and end the uncertainty which currently exists.

There is really no reason whatsoever for the minister to continue with these delays causing this uncertainty in our community. I believe she is continuing to play politics with the lives of young Australians when she could split this bill and put these non-controversial aspects in place as early as this month. Students really do need certainty as they begin planning for the rest of their lives. We are talking about 17- and 18-year-old kids moving 200 kilometres, 300 kilometres, 400 kilometres or more away from their homes to establish themselves in cities and right now they have no idea what level of support they are going to be provided with by the government.

Looking to the future, there is no doubt that we need to do more to provide extra assistance for regional students. Last month we had a Senate committee inquiry which found, amongst its eight recommendations, that there should be a tertiary access allowance of $10,000 per year for students forced to move away from home to attend university. We really can do better and it really is incumbent upon the minister to end the uncertainty as soon as possible and to bring the legislation back to the House. (Time expired)

Fremantle Electorate: 2011 International Sailing Federation Sailing World Championships

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (9.39 am)—I want to speak today about a forthcoming event in my electorate: namely, the 2011 International Sailing Federation, or ISAF, Sailing World Championships. This prestigious regatta will be held in December next year and will involve 1,400 competitors from around the world in addition to thousands of officials and spectators. These championships will constitute the main qualifier for the sailing component of the 2012 London Olympics, and this will be an event of great sporting and sports tourism significance.

Fremantle is a place of special maritime and sailing heritage. It is Western Australia’s principal port. This has been the point of arrival for tens of thousands of migrants who have made Fremantle—and indeed Australia—the multicultural success that it is today. It is a city that loves to play host and does so with a great generosity of spirit and style. And, to top it all, our coast offers some of the best sailing conditions in the world. For all of these reasons, it is no surprise that Fremantle was selected in 2007 from a group of eight cities around the world bidding for the right to host this event.

Last December it was my pleasure to join the Minister for Sport at an event in Fremantle to announce federal government funding for the ISAF event of $8.6 million through the national partnership agreement on health services. This contribution will fund Olympic-class boats, race management equipment, and training for volunteers and officials. It will also support the Emerging Nations Program, which exists to give sailors from less advanced sailing nations the opportunity to be involved in competition at the highest level. Our first regatta for those competitors took place last December and the next regatta will be held on the weekend of 19 and 20 February this year. These preparatory events follow and are related to a series of intensive training camps which have involved 40 sailors from 30 emerging sailing nations.
I wholeheartedly applaud the fact that John Longley has been chosen as the event director of the ISAF 2011 Sailing World Championships. John was a grinder aboard Australia II when it wrested the America’s Cup from the New York Yacht Club in 1983. He was the general manager of the Endeavour replica project and subsequently of the HM Bark Endeavour Foundation and, until very recently, the CEO of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce. He has been a leading member of the Fremantle community and of the Australian sailing community for many years. John’s commitment to Fremantle, his passion for and involvement in sailing and his expertise make him the perfect person for the role of event director of the 2011 ISAF Sailing World Championships in Fremantle.

This Olympic qualifying international regatta will be a fantastic opportunity for Fremantle. I am very pleased that the federal government is supporting this event to such a significant degree, and I look forward to working with John and the event team, with the City of Fremantle and with the wider community to help fulfil its potential.

**Workplace Relations**

Mr Lindsay (Herbert) (9.43 am)—I want to alert the parliament to a story in the Sydney Morning Herald this morning. It underlines my increasing concern about the unhealthy relationship between Labor governments in Australia and the unions of workers in Australia. This morning’s story in the Sydney Morning Herald referred to Australia Post, who have a computer lock key on their mailboxes so that, when the Australia Post workers go around to collect mail, Australia Post have a record of when a mailbox was accessed and who accessed it. The New South Wales government have an act called the Workplace Surveillance Act, and the New South Wales Attorney General has announced that today he will be personally appearing in the Federal Court to argue that Australia Post are answerable to criminal prosecution under the state’s Workplace Surveillance Act because they dare to want to know that their workers actually undid the mailboxes, collected the mail and moved on, and at what time. That is just extraordinary.

The reason that Australia Post do this is twofold. Firstly, there have been issues of mail theft and they need to know who has been opening post boxes and when. But there have also been issues of improper claiming of overtime, which this system in fact addresses. Have we got to a situation in this country where, under government legislation, the employer is not entitled to know the whereabouts of their employees and what they might be doing? Is that where we are at? If it is, that is just extraordinary. We are getting increasing unreasonable demands because the unions feel that, under the patronage of the current Labor governments, they are able to get away with this. Look at what has happened in Western Australia: increases in conditions that are worth $50,000 for no increase in productivity, leading to salaries of $200,000 in the Maritime Union operations in Western Australia. Ordinary Australians look at that and think that that is so wrong, and it is so wrong. All of us should understand that you just cannot keep upping your wages without delivering something in terms of productivity to the employer. I finish where I started: I am becoming increasingly worried about the unhealthy power relationship between Labor governments and unions in this country.

**Intergenerational Report: Disability**

Mr Shorten (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (9.46 am)—The Intergenerational Report, released by the Treasurer on Monday, laid out a stark challenge:
how do we increase our productivity as our population ages? A big part of this challenge is how we empower the growing number of Australians living with a disability. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released numbers last year which show that this year there are around 1.5 million people living with a severe or profound disability and that there will be almost 2.3 million by 2030. We in this country need to stop thinking of people with a disability as charity cases or as a burden. They cannot be an afterthought. We need to recognise that people with a disability are people with skills and talents who are valuable contributors to any family, community, organisation or business. They are part of the building of this nation. Too many Australians with a disability are both poor and powerless. This is not due to their disability but due to the entrenched discrimination they experience in their daily lives. They and their carers are continually forced to make hard choices, to save every spare cent for aids and equipment, to have their lives limited both by the impairment and the community’s treatment of it.

The Rudd government has made a start and I am proud of the real improvements we are making to the lives of people with disabilities. But despite this and the best efforts of thousands of carers, both paid and unpaid, the system we have throughout this nation remains a patchwork of services which is crisis driven and reactive. Australian governments at all levels spend approximately $20 billion a year in the disability welfare system. But the question is: is it enough and are we spending what we spend efficiently? It is clear to me that the current system cannot go on forever and that is why the Rudd government asked the Productivity Commission late last year to investigate a national long-term care and support scheme. This kind of scheme, which has growing support amongst people with a disability and their carers, has the potential to change the way that disability is supported in this country. It will be up to the Productivity Commission to crunch the numbers on the scheme, but I believe that it is common sense that a better system is one that intervenes early, offers support before a problem becomes a crisis and that gets people into work. This will save us a lot of money, as well as providing greater equity.

We know that disability can be acquired in an instant through a genetic twist of fate, through an accident or indeed as a consequence of ageing. What we should not have is Australian society allowing these shafts of fate to define and limit a person’s life. The Productivity Commission this year will start looking at the cost benefits and the feasibility of approaches to provide a national disability insurance system on an entitlement basis for eligible people with a severe or profound disability. It will look at a no-fault social insurance model, reflecting the shared risk of disability across the population. The detail will be complex and the system, if it were to be created, would certainly require a lot of analysis. We are not a government that will shy away from major reform, and a national disability insurance scheme would provide, once and for all, a better deal for people with a disability and their carers.

**Victorian Bushfires**

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.49 am)—It was 222 years ago that the first church service was held at Sydney Cove. Reverend Richard Johnson was the preacher at that service. I am going to another service on Sunday. That service is at Labertouche. There we will be remembering what happened in the terrible fires that swept through Victoria. I was standing in my kitchen; the Jon Faine program was on—Jon Faine normally does not bring me to tears, but he should—and I could not help but be moved by what I heard. This was months after the
fires. A woman came on the program and she was explaining through her veil of tears what it was like to be a mum who had lost a daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. The pain that that woman was expressing through the radio was such that, unless you had experienced the pain yourself or heard what she was saying, you could not help but be moved by it and be sensitive to her plight. You could not help but know that there were many people like her who had got up to an ordinary day and had their lives changed in a moment. By nightfall, not only did we have many dead; we had people who became heroes overnight by their actions: what they said, what they did and how they reacted.

That will go on at this small get together, this small church service at Labertouche. In fact, there is an inward feeling of: ‘Just leave us alone. Just let us think about this together. Let us grieve together.’ More importantly, we as a community and as a parliament must remember that, where there are tragedies and those tragedies have affected lives, in those lives the grief goes on and on and on. We have to be sensitive to knowing that. To that mum, whose name was Joy or Joan—if you are listening Joy or Joan—we remember you. We will not forget that there are people still hurting today. Even with all the work that we have done together as a parliament in a bipartisan way—and the parliamentary secretary is here and knows exactly what I am talking about—you should know that on this day we are with you, that we think about you now and again as you drift across our minds and that this parliament will continue to do all that it can, whenever it can, to participate in your place.

Australia Day Awards

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (9.52 am)—I say to the member for McMillan that I commend his remarks in this place and that I support them. I would like to speak about the Holt Australia Day ceremony in Doveton this year, where I had the honour of being able to present 17 local volunteers, through the Holt Australia Day awards, with recognition of their selfless efforts in making the community a better place to be and to live.

These awards recognise and honour those who serve the community in often unrecognised and unheralded ways. They provide what I call the social glue that holds our community together. They often do that in a very quiet and selfless way; it is a way that eschews self-promotion. I think that particularly on Australia Day, a day that recognises that quintessential character of the Australian people, we should recognise that as a community, and that is why I conduct the Holt Australia Day awards.

In the time available to me, I would like to mention those who were the recipients of these awards and honour them again in this place today. Posthumously, we honoured Sister Ann Halpin, from Wellsprings for Women in Dandenong, an organisation that helps marginalised women in the local community. We honoured Aida Nyhuis, who is the coordinator of the Berwick Opportunity Shop; Jean Westerman, who has been involved in the community of Doveton for over 35 years, particularly in the local opportunity shop and at weekly luncheons at the Doveton Baptist Church; there is collectively a group called Salvo Access—volunteers who work at the Cranbourne Salvation Army opportunity shop and who devote a great deal of time to helping needy families in the area; Michelle Sanders, who is responsible for the annual single parents dinner in Berwick—an excellent way of reaching out to many families who really need it; Leslie Vincent Hughes, who puts in countless hours to raise funds for the RSL Anzac Day and Remembrance Day appeals; Victor Allan Dennis, who is actively in-
volved in many sporting and community groups having been a member of the Lions Club of Cranbourne since 1972 and of the Cranbourne Cricket Club; Tom and Maureen Miles, who have been chaplaincy visitors at the Casey Hospital since it opened five years ago; Betty Merrett, who was an inaugural member of the Doveton-Hallam CFA Ladies Auxiliary 1960 and will celebrate 50 years of service in June this year; Irene Prater, who is deeply involved in palliative care in the community; Stephanie Polykronakis, who at 10 years of age has been inspiring her peers through her work; and Trevor Scott, Master Ru Sun Shih, Door Mohammad Aschna, Dale Sheppard, Adolfo Crespin and Paddy Hamill.

If you listen to the stories about the contributions these people have made to the community they do, in my view, absolutely summarise what it means to be an Australian. Our society could not function without these people. They often devote a number of hours selflessly, at great personal expense to themselves, but what they are doing is making our community a better place to live and a better place to be. They are great inspiring examples for many of our young people who are coming through the community.

**Gilmore Electorate: Road Safety**

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.55 am)—I rise to bring to the attention of the House the condition of the Princes Highway on the South Coast, which has led to the lives of eight people being lost in my electorate in just over a month. From New Year’s Eve to today, three accidents occurred on the winding road near East Lynne, killing six adults and two children. These tragic deaths have shaken the entire community, and they must not be in vain. The people of Gilmore know only too well that the Princes Highway is one of the greatest infrastructure challenges facing our region, and alarm bells should be sounding loud and clear to the state and federal Labor governments right now.

I have written to the Prime Minister twice this year calling for extraordinary funding to get the job done. When a similar situation arose during the time of the former government and there was a spate of accidents which claimed the lives of 26 people in just 12 months on the Princes Highway, I approached the Prime Minister of the day, John Howard, and said, ‘Enough is enough.’ We secured $20 million for upgrades, and I am asking for the same thing now. Whilst it is a state road, the New South Wales Labor government is clearly broke and has shown no interest in fixing the problem. Federal government intervention is needed to prevent any more lives being unnecessarily lost. This money would ideally assist the states to begin emergency realignment expansion work and to help with what has been described as an unforgiving stretch of road.

Not to be forgotten in all of this is the important role that the Batemans Bay District Hospital has played in treating crash victims who have sustained injuries. Given the demand that is being placed on it, it is only fitting that its diminished services and funding be recognised and no longer ignored by this government, as lives are at risk. With the growing population, strong tourism numbers and industry opportunities in our region, we cannot afford to send a message to the nation that visiting the South Coast or doing business there is unwise or unsafe due to a lack of services or infrastructure.

In short, there are three things that I am requesting: first, that Mr Rudd allocate $20 million from his stimulus spending, perhaps from the trouble-ridden pink batt program, to help address the Princes Highway black spots south of Nowra; and, second, that he visit the South Coast for the first time, take a drive down to the Princes Highway one Sunday afternoon and
just see if he is comfortable with the bottlenecks that exist. Each accident causes many hours of delay, disrupting business and residents. Third, I am requesting that he deliver on his election promise to fix the health system and start by supporting Batemans Bay hospital, given its importance to the region, rather than dwindling its services into the ground.

My sentiments are not alone. There has been much written on the condition of the Princes Highway from Kiama to the Victorian border. The RTA, coronial inquiries, south-east Australian transport scheme members, community groups and even the NRMA, in their ‘fix our bloody road’ campaign, all concluded that the current level of funding is not adequate and attention is needed. Failure to do so leads to further tragedy.

**Shortland Electorate: Awards**

*Ms Hall* (Shortland) (9.58 am)—I would like to use this time to acknowledge the recipients of Australia Day awards in both the Lake Macquarie City Council area and the Wyong Shire Council area and also the recipients of the Shortland awards that were given on 25 January. The Citizen of the Year in Lake Macquarie was June Cameron, from Warners Bay. She received that award for her contribution to guiding. Deardre Ham was the Volunteer of the Year. She received that award for her commitment to the community and her generosity. The Community Group of the Year in Lake Macquarie was the Delta Society, which takes animals to see people in nursing homes and those who are sick. In Wyong Shire, it was Garry Prince, of Lake Munmorah, who was named the shire’s Citizen of the Year in recognition of his volunteer efforts for local groups.

The 2010 Shortland awards recognise the enormous contribution to the Shortland electorate and, in some cases, our region by a number of people. These awards are given annually, and the awardees are nominated by members of the community. The awards are only given to people who have made outstanding contributions to our community. The winners this year were Robert and Valerie Aspinall, for work on P&C canteens, bushfire brigades, Landcare and knitting for premature babies; Tracey Blair, Sailability; Mercia Buck, Lake Macquarie City Council, for music and culture; Phil Costello, Windale Public School; Professor James Denham for prostate cancer research, awareness and treatment; Betty Duddle for art society; Peter Field for the Windale school breakfast club and Windale Fresh; Mary Fitzgerald, Windale Public School office support; Una Ford, Pink Ladies—and she is a life member of the United Hospital Auxiliaries; Geoff Fry, a volunteer prostate counsellor, who donated a million dollars to cancer research; Keith Graham for contributions to the Swansea community—

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr A. J. Schultz)**—Order! It now being 10 am and in accordance with standing order 193, the time for members’ constituency statements has concluded.

*Ms Hall*—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My understanding is that the three-minute statements are sanctioned, that the three-minute statements can all be given and that they are not—

**The Deputy Speaker**—That is not my understanding. The standing order is quite specific and I am ruling on the standing order.

*Ms Hall*—I will take it up with the Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker**—You certainly have that option.

*Ms Hall*—Were there changes made to the standing orders?
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I remind the member for Shortland that the standing orders are quite specific on this. I have made the ruling. Please sit down.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2009-2010

Cognate bill:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2009-2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 3 February, on motion by Dr Emerson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (10.01 am)—Key measures that will receive funding under Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 include the Solar Homes and Communities Plan through the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts; the Home Insulation Program; the government response to the N1H1 influenza virus pandemic under the guidance of the Department of Health and Ageing; the General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme under the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; and funding to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to meet the cost of increased in irregular maritime arrivals. Under Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 funding will also be provided for the establishment of the Local Government Reform Fund.

Under the Solar Homes and Communities Plan, an additional $510 million will provide financial assistance to Australian community groups, small businesses and households. The program assists with the cost of installing eligible renewable energy systems. This particular program encourages Australians to think renewable energy and to invest in renewable energy. The funding provides an incentive to actively choose green energy. I am pleased to note, but not surprised, that my electorate of Lowe has been very receptive to the Solar Homes and Communities Plan. In fact, a constituent of mine phoned only last week to raise his support for the phasing out of electric hot water systems, emphasising his interest in renewable energy and noting it is a step in the right direction. Further, my constituent congratulated the government for initiatives that provide green alternative and incentives.

Unfortunately, figures indicate that the National Rainwater and Greywater Initiative was not as popular and adjustments will result in savings of $13 million in the current financial year. Forecasts for the Water Smart Australia Program will also be adjusted, contributing a further $10 million in savings in 2009-10. However, the government will bring forward $290 million from 2011-12 for the Home Insulation Program. The government will also provide the funding to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts for what is undoubtedly a popular program to provide the necessary funding to meet the unexpectedly high demand. It should be noted that the $290 million is in addition to the $695.8 million proposed in the Appropriation (Water Entitlements and Home Insulation) Bill 2009-2010.

Figures show that more than 190,000 households have already installed insulation with Australian government funding assistance. The demand reflects the desire of Australians to invest in measures that provide long-term benefits both financial and environmental. The Home Insulation Program has stimulated thousands of jobs and generated a much-needed boost to our economy during a time of economic uncertainty. This is illustrated in the appropriation of $40 million for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to meet the increased demand for assistance from the General Employee Entitlements
and Redundancy Scheme. The increase in applications is the result of an increase in the number of bankruptcies and insolvencies.

The payment scheme assists employees who have lost their jobs as a direct result of the insolvency of their employer and are owed particular employee entitlements. It is another example of the government assisting Australian workers during a time of uncertainty, and I am pleased this support will continue. There will be $20.3 million provided for the establishment of a 26-week environment and heritage training and work experience placement program, targeting job seekers between 17 and 24 years of age.

The National Green Jobs Corps is part of a $94 million green skills package to create 50,000 new green jobs and training places over three years. The package also includes 30,000 apprenticeships to equip young people with practical, job ready green skills. Six thousand new local jobs will be established that focus on environmental sustainability in communities struggling as a result of the financial crisis, and 4,000 training places will be created for long-term unemployed people in ceiling insulation installation. This program demonstrates that the Rudd government is committed to tackling the dual challenges posed by the global economic crisis and climate change. As Australia emerges from the global recession, our attention needs to turn to the shape that our economy will take in the future. It is imperative that we build a green economy, with green jobs and green infrastructure that will bring long-term and sustainable economic growth.

Under Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010, Centrelink will receive $12.4 million for the implementation of a more efficient reporting and administrative system. From 1 July 2010 paper forms received by Centrelink will be scanned and transferred electronically. The new process will reduce the costs of transferring documents between Centrelink sites and improve storage places. Estimates indicate that these changes alone will save a staggering $131.3 million. This is an incredible saving. Further, the government will update the reporting requirements for job seekers. Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 will also provide $14.5 million to introduce electronic lodgement facilities over the internet as well as voice recognition over the telephone. This will save time and money for both Centrelink and its customers. In fact, it is estimated that the modernisation of the reporting requirements for job seekers will deliver $95.2 million in savings over four years.

On a matter of health, Australia will recall the worldwide scare caused by the H1N1 influenza virus pandemic. Thankfully, the number of casualties did not reach predicted levels. However, the scare highlighted the need for and importance of preparedness in the event of future pandemics. In light of this, the Rudd government will contribute $45.2 million to support the storage, compounding and distribution of antivirals and personal protective equipment; the production, processing and distribution of immunisation consent forms; and an immunisation awareness campaign. Further, under Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 the Department of Health and Ageing will receive $12.4 million for the Zero Real Interest Loans program. This program was established with the aim of providing capital funding to build and improve residential aged-care and respite facilities in areas of high need. The funding that was not utilised last financial year due to project delays will be carried over to the same program this year.

In my electorate of Lowe, the ageing population could well be served by this scheme and I would encourage aged-care facilities in the area to put to use the available program opportuni-
ties. I have no doubt that the expansion of such services would be of enormous benefit to my community now and in the future. I had the great pleasure of hearing about the wonderful work of caring and dedicated aged-care and respite workers in my electorate. I recently received a letter from a reassured daughter of a man in need of high care who could not thank the dedicated staff enough for the respect and care shown to her father. I have also heard about difficulties others have experienced in finding a suitable aged-care facility with an available position. This funding specifically targets areas of high need to reduce such difficulties. The Zero Real Interest Loans program is a responsible initiative, recognising the needs of Australia’s future population, providing opportunities for businesses and the government to work together to fulfil those needs.

The government also proposes an additional appropriation of $19.95 million for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for the National Rental Affordability Scheme. The request for additional funding is a result of greater than expected demand from participating charities. However, the increase in funding will be balanced by a reduction in the estimated administrative refundable tax offset payments between the department and the Australian Taxation Office. Again, the greater than expected take-up of government initiatives such as the National Rental Affordability Scheme is indicative of the confidence public-private partnerships enjoy—a model that continues to strengthen under the Rudd government. I am pleased to report that so far more than 20 units under NRAS have been provided in my electorate of Lowe, and I look forward to more being released for my constituents. My electorate suffers one of the highest mortgage and rental stress rates in Australia. Affordable accommodation is a serious problem in Lowe and I look forward to the continuation of the program, strengthened by the additional funding.

The government is also investing in small businesses. In fact, last year during the global financial crisis the federal government offered a small business and general business tax break, which provided a 50 per cent tax offset on particular business expenses. Small businesses with a turnover of less than $2 million a year could claim a 50 per cent tax deduction for eligible assets that cost more than $1,000.

The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 will provide $11.3 million to be carried forward from the last financial year to fund a public awareness campaign. Small businesses are imperative to the Australian economy and the small business and general tax break is just one measure among many that supports small businesses. The Rudd government appreciates the important role small businesses play in our economy. Measures delivered by the government include the increase in the rate of the small business and general business tax break, the new research and development tax credit, the Small Business Support Line, Small Business Online, the new Commonwealth Commercialisation Institute, a $50 million boost to the Export Market Development Grants Scheme, the 12-month extension of exceptional circumstances assistance under the rural small business program and PAYG cash flow relief initiative.

These measures are in addition to the two stimulus packages delivered by the Rudd government, and I know that they have been well received by the small businesses in my electorate of Lowe. As previously mentioned, the total additional appropriation being sought in Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 is $522 million. In the limited time available, I would like to highlight a few of the more prominent appropriation amounts. Firstly, the Department of
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government will receive no less than $12 million to establish a local government reform fund. The fund will provide assistance to local councils to manage their existing infrastructure and help plan for future needs. Under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program community facilities such as community centres, libraries, sports grounds and environmental infrastructure will be built.

Last year my electorate of Lowe received over $5 million for the development of the Drummoyne Sports and Cultural Precinct under the $800 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. The project includes a multipurpose facility with an undercover training area and practice nets, spectator seating and a large flexible meeting space. In addition, the funding will provide upgrades to Drummoyne and Taplin parks, installing flood-lighting, a playground, relocating basketball practice courts, widening the foreshore pathway and improving water access through a new pontoon and boat ramp. The Rudd government funding for these projects has also been very well received by my constituents. The construction work is well underway and will provide a state-of-the-art facility that will provide strong economic stimulus and will continue to provide a wonderful community benefit well into the future.

Under Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 a reallocation of the appropriation is proposed for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts for the National Solar Schools Program: $19.8 million will be provided as a state, ACT, NT and local government item offset by the reductions in Appropriation Act (No. 1) under administered expense funding. The funding will assist in the component of the program that is delivered through the states to non-government schools. In addition, $15.8 million will be brought forward from 2012-13 for the program to meet the demand in the current financial year for non-government schools. Only recently a non-government school in Lowe, the Presbyterian Ladies College in Croydon proudly displayed the 65 new solar panels they have installed. The school received federal funding to assist with the purchase and installation of the panels, which is estimated to save the school $70,000 over 10 years and $360,000 over 25 years. Not only will the school save thousands of dollars but also the solar panels will reduce carbon emissions and produce pollution-free electricity.

Urgent action is required to address the challenges we face caused by climate change, and I am delighted that this funding will be brought forward to assist the installation of solar systems in our schools across Australia. I am particularly pleased that schools like PLC in my electorate are taking up the opportunity provided by the federal government to do their bit to fight climate change. Well done, PLC! I take this opportunity to note that at the end of the year the principal, Dr Bill McKeith, will farewell PLC after 25 years. Dr McKeith has introduced and developed many initiatives at the school. I have had the great pleasure of knowing Dr McKeith over the years that I have been the federal member and he has been an outstanding principal. I wish him every success in his future endeavours.

The vision of the government has provided my electorate of Lowe and electorates around Australia with new infrastructure and programs to improve the environment, health, employment opportunities and education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In reflecting on the many areas of funding provided by the government, I would like to use what time is left to raise an issue that I believe is important for all Australians and one that has the support of many of my constituents. Tragically too many Australians have been exposed to asbestos
products in their homes and work. Too many simply do not know of the dangers that confront them.

In my electorate of Lowe there many old Victorian, Federation and Californian bungalow homes that are riddled with hidden asbestos products. I dare say that many people are unaware of the silent killer that rests within their homes—not just in their fibro walls and ceilings but from the dust under the carpets and driveways. As I have previously said in this place, next year 750 Australians will be diagnosed with asbestos related diseases and by 2020 it is estimated that Australia will have 13,000 cases of asbestos related cancers. Asbestos is very much a silent killer. All of us were moved by the inspirational work of Bernie Banton to raise awareness of asbestos. Bernie was able to achieve so much in his time, and we need to ensure his legacy lives on. That is why I am calling for a national awareness campaign to ensure that all Australians understand the risks asbestos poses to them and their families. It is essential that any family thinking of renovating their home assesses with their builders where asbestos is hidden and plans how to handle it safely.

I am also of the view that the government should consider establishing a national body to coordinate the removal of all asbestos products and asbestos-containing materials from Australia. This body would have the power to coordinate and manage the removal of asbestos from public places such as schools. I understand that there would be significant costs involved in such a program. However, it is a cost that would be overwhelmingly dwarfed by the costs of exposing Australians to asbestos. Such a program would build on the good work already done by the Rudd government in relation to asbestos. Last January the Prime Minister officially opened the Bernie Banton Centre, the world’s first asbestos diseases research centre, at Concord Hospital in my electorate. The government has contributed $5 million for research initiatives to be undertaken at that centre. Moreover, in November last year the Rudd government and the New South Wales government announced that they would save the compensation fund set up by James Hardie to support asbestos victims through a $320 million loan.

I am proud to be a member of a government that is so committed to supporting victims of asbestos. I believe we can build on this good work by raising awareness about the lethal and devastating threat that asbestos continues to pose and by taking measures to remove this substance from public places. There are many other initiatives and programs that are worthy of government funding, and they may be presented for future consideration.

The economic forecasts look positive, but we must not be complacent. The Rudd government will continue to make decisions in the best interests of Australia and the proposed measures contained in these bills are no exception. It is no fluke that we have done best of all the OECD countries in handling the global financial crisis and that has been appreciated, particularly by small business in my electorate. I commend the bills to the House. (Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.17 am)—I would like to take this opportunity to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 and related economic issues. I have taken the opportunity over the last few weeks, and obviously well before then as well, to doorknock my way through various parts of my electorate of Cowan. I enjoy those opportunities to go up to the front doors of houses, to introduce myself and to genuinely surprise people that I actually do my own doorknocking. It is very interesting to speak to these people. When you surprise them at their front door and they are not prepared, they generally talk about the things that really matter to them right up front. Mostly,
they talk about local government stuff and state issues. A consistent theme I have heard both at the front doors of houses in Cowan and in the shopping centres of Cowan, when people have just come up and started talking to me, has been the arrival of the boats into Australian waters and what has changed in the last couple of years.

It is a matter of great concern. They want the government to change the laws back to the way they were, to deter these illegal arrivals—that is, those who jump the queue. They do not like the special deals that were given to those involved in the Oceanic Viking fiasco. A lot of people speak to me about fair treatment for all and not special treatment for some. The government should know what is happening with those who jump the queue. What they should know is that all those who have waited and done the right thing feel that they have been slapped across the face. Those who have languished in refugee camps, waiting their turn, and those who know of their relatives still waiting in refugee camps in places like the Thai-Burma border are greatly irritated and unhappy about the government’s attitude, which allows those who have money to come straight here—albeit via the gym and modern recreation facilities on Christmas Island.

Then what about the South Africans, the Zimbabweans and the British? We see a lot of these people in Western Australia and it is excellent. They are the ones who follow the established rules and procedures to get their visas. There are also all those who remember all too well how long it took them to actually make Australia their home. These are the points made to me by my constituents at their front doors and by those who have approached me in shopping centres across Cowan, and I have to completely agree with them. Maybe that is not what people think here in Canberra, 3,000 kilometres away, or maybe down in Melbourne, but it is a big issue in Perth. That is why I am keen to see a return to temporary visas and restrictions on access to benefits—as our leader, Tony Abbott, has outlined. What this country needs is to be back in control of our borders. What this country needs to do is restore the integrity of the immigration system. What this country does not need is a Rudd Labor government that gives special deals and that is soft on those who seek to sidestep the queue. This is the problem that so many of my constituents tell me concerns them.

Already the government has released the third Intergenerational report, where they now bleat about the struggles of keeping the budget under control. I can tell the House that this government long ago gave up trying to keep the budget under control. Record debt levels place our ability to pay for our future needs in the greatest danger. The point needs to be made that while the government might whinge about our fight to preserve the private health rebate and how we are stopping them from cashing in on their 2007 broken promise to not change the rebate, that promise was made with full knowledge of the circumstances of the ageing population. It is therefore not our move to hold the Rudd government to their 2007 promise on the private health rebate that is undermining the economic future of the economy; rather it is the outrageous spending that has been the hallmark of this Rudd Labor government that has undermined our future.

When considering these bills, they are clearly evidence that this is a government addicted to spending and pork-barrelling. Spend now and build a lot of vertical structures upon which to put some very big signs. I recall being at the Carramar Primary School graduation in December, Carramar being in the north of the electorate of Cowan, and I saw a small plaque commemorating the former government’s Investing in Our Schools Program placed on the
wall next to the stage. In recent months, and in direct contrast, we have seen huge signs placed outside schools around Australia. They are great big signs costing hundreds of dollars each and they are all paid for by the taxpayer in the huge interest bills that this government has inflicted upon this generation and the next.

These bills comprise an additional $2 billion of borrowings inflicted upon the Australian people, all to justify a huge sign in front of a building and a photo opportunity, with or without hard hats, for Labor Party MPs or candidates. I would reiterate that there is a huge difference between the acknowledgement required by the Howard government, normally an A5-sized plaque, versus the around two-metre-wide signs required by the Rudd government, signs that have been placed outside polling booths, also known as schools.

In other places in Cowan where things are happening I note that there is a lot of construction going on. I have personal involvement in a number of infrastructure projects around Cowan. My petition regarding Wanneroo Road in the vicinity of Ashby and Tapping has seen the long-awaited state government work commence with the construction of a dual carriageway well underway and expected to be completed by mid-2010. I was also involved, again with a petition in 2007, in the construction of Hepburn Avenue at Ballajura between Alexander Drive and Beechboro Road. Later that year the Howard government’s funding commitment identified the need for and led to the building of the road in Ballajura and the duplication of Hepburn Avenue at Alexander Heights. That was $10 million that put critical infrastructure on the public agenda, and it led to an obvious attempt to catch up by Labor, who later matched the commitments made. In addition to where we led the way in that part of Cowan we also added $10 million for the Reid Highway and Alexander Drive overpass. All these involved us leading the way for the benefit of the local people. Although Labor later followed in matching our commitments, the progress has been slow. My question is: what has actually been achieved? The only road that is in use and funded federally is the first stage of Ocean Reef Road, and who funded that road? We, the coalition, did. Who put their sign up claiming it? The Rudd government did.

It is worth noting why this road was so important. It was designed to alleviate congestion on Gnangara Road. The key element was that transiting traffic would be put on a better road, easing the difficulties for families getting in and out of Landsdale and Gnangara during the peak times of day. My position on this issue is well subscribed, with hundreds of people supporting it and with this support being a key factor in the Howard government granting and delivering $7 million to the City of Wanneroo to get the job done. This job was to make travel safer for families and other users, linking up to near Alexander Drive, making this main route a dual carriageway with two lanes each way as opposed to a single lane each way at Gnangara Road, thick with trucks and other industrial traffic.

The funding agreement was for the City of Wanneroo to complete the building of that road by June 2010. This was the plan as to when the lives of local residents would be made safer and easier, with this new road completed. I can unfortunately inform the House that the road will not be completed by that date. It currently ends well short of Alexander Drive and it does not help local families, with the congestion issues remaining not only unresolved but worse. It would seem that the government has authorised the delay in the form of a varied funding agreement with the City of Wanneroo.
The stark reality is that every road promised by Labor, or now controlled by Labor, has not been delivered, and I cannot see those roads being completed by the time of the next election. Add that failure to that of the comprehensive failure of the government to deliver the Wanneroo GP superclinic. Bids closed some 10 months ago and since then there has been no operator announced, no building established and therefore no patients seen or assisted. The question then becomes: when will this clinic open and when will the patients be seen? Will it be before the federal election or is this another promise ready for re-announcing?

In considering the track record of delivery, this is not good. Delay and failure to deliver outcomes is the hallmark of this government, unless you judge success by the erection of signs. In that category there has been great success—the big signs claiming spending are all up. The priority of this Labor government is clear: never mind the construction, focus on the signage. As a case in point, when I was at a school in third term last year I saw on the reception counter a framed certificate celebrating the government’s spending at the school—however, not even a sod had been turned; but the branding was already there, positioned prominently. Again, it is clear that the priority is the signage, the self-promotion; it is not about delivering.

I noted before that, when combined, these bills allow another $2 billion to be borrowed—that is, $2 billion to be put on the national credit card, racking up interest, only to be paid back down the track when the coalition has to address the debt and deficit and pay it off. The question is: does this represent responsible spending? Speaking of spending, what then are the consequences of reckless spending? What we face now is pressure on interest rates due to the spending that has taken place. Much of the money that has been pumped into the economy has contributed towards inflation by driving up prices.

Already what is being faced is that the government provided up to $21,000 for first home buyers when interest rates were at the lowest levels as the RBA cut rates to stop the economy going into recession. Three rises in rapid succession have increased the pressure on these first home buyers, and if the predictions of three more rises before the end of the year take place then I really fear for these people. Fortunately, the RBA did not raise interest rates on Tuesday; but this is a big warning, not for the RBA but for the government. They need to reduce their spending and try to help stop the pressure on new home buyers. Mortgage defaults were okay in 2009; however, that was not everywhere, as the member for Lowe said recently in his contribution. Extreme care needs to be taken in 2010 to reduce the increase in mortgage defaults that may be expected with the projected three interest rate rises.

Further out in our considerations, we should also look at the outcomes of excessive government spending, being that if you borrow money, you do actually have to pay interest. It is also the case that when you pay your interest bill that reduces the amount of money you can spend on other items, or programs in this case. Unless government spending again accelerates, we can expect that in 2013-14, some $9 billion in interest payments would be required. That is $9 billion spent on servicing debt and not on the delivery of essential programs. I wonder what more could have been achieved if the Rudd government had adopted our more modest stimulus package. Is it any wonder that Appropriation Bill (No. 3) sees the clawing back of money that has been set aside for replacement of assets and returns that money to consolidated revenue? Done under the guise of Operation Sunlight and billed as enhanced budget...
transparency, this looks more like a desperate pursuit of money to make up for the reckless and record spending undertaken by the Rudd government.

As the government risks the ability to replace assets in the future through this measure the search for cash reminds me of those beachcombers with their metal detectors heading out to the beach in the evening or the early morning searching for coins or other valuables that may have dropped out of beach bags or pockets of the last beachgoers. Perhaps the government could contract these beachcombers to help find some cash!

What we know for sure is that the books, the financial sheets of this nation, will not be in the black for years. The government is still taking us further into the red, true to the great Labor tradition of debt and deficit. What we should be concerned about is the tenacity the government shows in uncovering opportunities to spend more. I wonder how long it will be before new ways are found to spend money from our future or to find ways to fleece the people of more money to help pay for that part of the government’s spending that is not borrowed. It is worth reminding this chamber that when Labor was last in government, just after we were assured the budget was balanced and no debt existed, we won the election and found that there was an immediate $10 billion deficit, and $96 billion of debt. I recall that it took some 10 years to repay the money for that debt. This is a point worth noting: it was 10 years of interest payments sucking opportunity out of the Howard government’s policy options.

When we are returned to government in the future it will take time to pay back the debt and return the federal budget to surplus. It will take time but it will happen. That, of course, is the other great tradition of Australian politics: the coalition is the side of surpluses and the side that pays off Labor debt. I only hope that it will not be too much longer before we can begin.

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (10.31 am)—I rise to speak on the aspects of these appropriation bills, the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010, that relate to my portfolio responsibilities. Indeed, the majority of the funds allocated in these bills are for the government’s nation-building activities. In particular, our East Kimberley development package makes up the biggest tranche of funding—almost $115 million. My colleague the member for Brand, the Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, will no doubt speak on that a little bit later in the debate.

The bill also allocates funding for some smaller but especially important features of the government’s Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan. In particular this bill sets aside $12½ million towards our $25 million local government reform fund. There are also funds set aside for the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program.

Over the past two years the Rudd government and local governments have embarked on a substantially new partnership. Indeed, our support for local government is unprecedented. Overall, more than $1 billion is going directly to councils under the RLCIP. We know the effects of this funding, combined with the Rudd government’s broader stimulus measures: we have kept local economies right across the country ticking over during the global economic recession. We have kept Australians working, supporting jobs today while building the infrastructure of tomorrow. Councils, their residents and ratepayers have been the overwhelming beneficiaries here. It is why we have national unemployment at 5½ per cent. It is an extraordinary achievement and speaks to the resilience and spectacular success of the government’s stimulus package.
I have to say that one of the great privileges of my role as parliamentary secretary over the last seven months or so has been the many visits I have made to communities to see the community infrastructure projects across the country in various stages of work or completion. As members know, there is a lot to see among the more than 3,300 community infrastructure projects spread across the country’s 565 local government entities. There are a lot of stories but I will share just one of those stories with this chamber—one story in 3,000 or so.

On a very nice Saturday in October last year I had the pleasure of going up to the Berowra Community Centre on Sydney’s northern outskirts. The centre is in a lovely bushland setting just off the Pacific Highway: a national road, I might add, where we are spending more than $2 billion over the next six years—an extraordinary investment. But there I was in Berowra, that particular Saturday morning in October last year to open a much smaller project, but a very important one. This was the new extension to the centre’s library and various other improvements.

The patrons of the community centre were just thrilled with the new foyer, the new layout, the carpet and the new system to display all the lovely community artworks. It was a very enjoyable morning. The member for Berowra was there to take part in the celebrations but, strangely enough, when it came time for the official photos he became unusually shy. Those of us in northern Sydney know that it is very unlike the member for Berowra to miss out on a photo opportunity. When I urged him to join us he begged off and said, ‘I know how these things can be misused.’ But, interestingly, my good friend Nick Berman, the Mayor of Hornsby, was not so bashful. He was happy to stand shoulder to shoulder with me under the Nation Building Program stimulus sign. He was holding his gorgeous young baby daughter, Kate. It was a lovely morning for everyone.

I want to make a point. I know that the member for Berowra may have been a little camera-shy that day but he knows there is much to praise in this project, most importantly the fact that 23 local tradesmen and suppliers were employed during the construction phase and that a further 15 were employed in the Berowra Community Centre renovations. Again, to come to the impact on employment, it means that unemployment in this particular part of Sydney is around 4.2 to 4.3 per cent, an extraordinary achievement. The member for Berowra with other members of the coalition may decry our stimulus projects in this place but, when it comes to actions in his own electorate and in the electorates of others, I think perhaps the member for Berowra is a secret admirer of the Rudd government’s stimulus.

Valentine’s Day is coming up; it is just around the corner. It is a time of year when secret admirers are known to put pen to paper, so I am going to make a plea to all the secret admirers of our stimulus package on the other side to put pen to paper. I think this is the big chance. Get your pens out, because I know that Minister Albanese, my esteemed colleague the Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, Gary Gray, and I are going to check our in-trays over the next couple of weeks leading up to Valentine’s Day to see just how many are true to themselves. No letterhead will be necessary. I say to the members opposite: if you want to send me or Albo or Gary a stimulus Valentine, then go right ahead.

We know that the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program projects have been extremely important. It is a pity that not all members in this place can bring themselves to appreciate their critical importance. Last week I travelled to Western Australia and renewed my acquaintance with one conservative politician who has no qualms about praising our Na-
tion Building Economic Stimulus Plan. I was in Perth to meet with the chairs and deputies of the Regional Development Australia network that we put together, with the Parliamentary Leader of the Nationals WA, Brendon Grylls. In contrast to his shy counterparts in this chamber, Mr Grylls appreciates the federal government’s enormous contribution to infrastructure and in particular to regional development—one fair dinkum conservative politician who will say publicly just how vital our stimulus has been, and I had to go to Western Australia to find him.

In fairness, I suppose there is not a very conducive climate in the opposition at the moment for free expression on these issues. After all, the opposition leader has been saying that he wants to slash our stimulus plan. This is the same stimulus plan that has kept the country working and has supported Australian jobs, small businesses and working families right across the country. It includes more than 28,000 nation-building infrastructure projects that are now under way, setting us up for future growth with major investments in rail, roads, ports, broadband, clean energy and, let us not forget, the largest school modernisation project in Australian history. But who knows what and where the opposition leader will cut if he gets his chance? Will it be new classrooms in Eastwood and Gladesville? Will it be the $3.25 million Hilton Community Precinct development in the City of Fremantle? That is going to transform a number of outdated buildings, provide a brand-new, first-class community hub and help otherwise disengaged young people in that area, many of them young Indigenous children.

I had the pleasure of visiting the future site of this much needed community infrastructure in Hilton last year. I was there with my colleague Melissa Parke. Is this project in jeopardy? Will the opposition leader cut the more than $16 million set for the Townsville CBD redevelopment project in the electorate of Herbert? That is going to recapture Flinders Street’s historic role as the high street of Townsville. Will the opposition leader take away the $4 million public library redevelopment project from the community of Campbelltown in Adelaide? Large projects or small projects? I think it is reasonable to say that there is climate of fear in the opposition. I am going to look with interest to see how many Liberal and National Party members are going to nominate particular infrastructure projects to be curtailed.

Local government, too, has much to fear from the opposition leader. Many of these projects that we are now funding have lain dormant on council books for some time, waiting for the partnership money from the Commonwealth that will allow them to be brought to fruition. The opposition leader needs to come clean on his plans on where he will cut back on stimulus and tell the Australian public what he will cut. Interestingly, we have had the shadow finance minister out there already musing aloud: perhaps cuts to schools, perhaps cuts to the Public Service. We await further pronouncements from the shadow finance minister.

With the investment that we have made—the money we have put into local government—comes the accompanying responsibility for councils to be accountable for the funding they receive from the federal government. Here there is need for reform, and we see the money for that in this appropriation legislation. The Local Government Reform Fund aims to improve the capability of local government to manage assets and financial planning processes as well as increase collaboration between councils to deliver services for their ratepayers. The fund will support proposals which build local government capacity. The sorts of projects we will be
supporting are collaborative projects between groups of local governments—for example, to provide shared service delivery, workforce planning or joint purchasing.

Some councils have been doing this for many years, and they are the champions in this area. In Perth, again, the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council comprises councils from the cities of Melville, Rockingham and Cockburn and the towns of Kwinana and East Fremantle. These councils banded together some time ago to work on waste management. They voluntarily coordinated their waste recycling and resource recovery and are as a result delivering better services at a better price to their communities. The Local Government Reform Fund is designed to help these kinds of initiatives. It is complemented by the $8 million for the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government. This newly established centre, based at the University of Technology in Sydney, is working with local governments to promote best practice and to encourage innovation and professionalism within the sector. This federal support is an opportunity for local governments to ensure that they can keep acting in the best interests of their ratepayers, and it is an opportunity that I urge councils not to pass up.

As part of these bills we are also appropriating $18.3 million in direct payments to local government under the Roads to Recovery program. Councils can use the funding they receive from the program to make urgent repairs and to upgrade their local road networks. The funding is untied and can go towards the local priorities identified by local communities. Overall, the Rudd government has committed $1.7 billion to Australia’s councils and shires over the next five years under Roads to Recovery. It is record funding, and it will deliver more than 20,000 small-scale road projects in every part of the country across the next five years. There is also another $10 million in these bills, as I said, for our Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. As has been noted in previous debates, these additional appropriations are fully offset by savings against the original appropriations.

We are a fiscally responsible government, in both word and deed. The Rudd Labor government has been a good friend to local government. In my many engagements with mayors, deputies and council members across the country, this new partnership—this new level of collaboration—is indeed appreciated. I commend these bills to the House.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (10.45 am)—Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and cognate bill have been characterised by a number of speakers before me, so I will not go over the details. I am always curious when I hear about Operation Sunlight being an effort by the Rudd Labor government to suck up cash out of departments which are squirreling it away. That seems to be what we are doing now to try and fund the extravagant expenditure of the Rudd Labor government that is part of these bills. Then there is a further allocation for a number of programs that others have spoken about. I want to touch on a couple of those programs.

There is a department that features prominently in these two bills, and that is Minister Garrett’s department. The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts is mentioned in these bills. I wonder why there seems to be so little interest from Minister Garrett in making sure that the programs that his department is operating are not bungled and are properly managed and I wonder how much effort has gone into that aspect of the administration of the department. I particularly refer to one that I have spoken about previously, the very troubled Green Loans Program. I recounted late last year that, despite a lot of flamboyance, prominence and big promises about what the Green Loans Program would do, our inquiries through the estimates process and through parliamentary questions on notice revealed that,
despite big talk dating back to October 2007 about just what this program would do, as of 18 August last year not a single green loan had been granted. This came as a shock to me.

What I must say is that those seeking green loans had already been shocked long before I was. They had gone through in good faith the process that had been outlined for obtaining green loans, after many false starts about its kick-off date and the fumbles and the fake promises that have been characteristic of this program, to find that all is not as it had been made sound to be. In the lead-up to the last election, there was talk of 200,000 homes being able to get concessional loans subsidised up to the value of $10,000—the value of the loan—with interest payments subsidised by Rudd Labor. It then drifted and started to look a little bit different.

By May 2008, Minister Garrett was talking about green loans for Aussies and how all this was about energy efficiency and was all provided for in the budget and that it was all good to go. A press release entitled ‘Green loans for Aussie homes’ of 13 May said that green loans were expected to be available by early 2009. This is the start of the date slippage that has surrounded this program. A few weeks later, the Prime Minister said in a statement:

That is why we are: helping Australian families take practical action to improve energy efficiency and save money in their homes and rebates, low-interest loans, energy-savings standards and better information.

That claim was made on 5 June by the Prime Minister. Anyone who heard would have believed that that was available there and then. It was not. There was still plenty to be done before that particular program would get off the ground.

As I said, even though statements were made on 5 June 2008 by Prime Minister Rudd that his government had these facilities available, questions on notice to the House revealed that statements by the Prime Minister about what was being done and what was available contrasted with the facts secured through the parliamentary process on 18 August 2009, over a year later, that not a single green loan had been made available. So we thought that we would dig a bit deeper.

We have had regular contact with home assessors. Home assessors are the very committed individuals and small businesspeople who go around visiting homes to identify sustainability improvement opportunities. That is the front end of this process. They get accredited, liaise with Minister Garrett’s department to identify homes to assess, they carry out the assessment and then some time later a report goes to the home from Minister Garrett’s department to advise about things that can be done to improve the sustainability of that home and as the key input to accessing a green loan.

I have had former members of the ACT legislature, who are not necessarily fellow travelers of mine in a political sense, outraged that they have been waiting month after month after month for that report to come back. They have been waiting month after month for the key piece of evidence that a person needs to have to access what until 18 August 2009 was not green loans but the idea of a green loan. They need this home sustainability report to go to their bank to seek an opportunity to get this very elusive green loan.

I was advised that, despite repeated contacts with the department, a former elected representative, very committed to sustainability, could not even get that input document. He could not even get what was promised and is supposed to be routinely available just a few short
weeks after the assessment. Months and months later, phone call after phone call later, Minister Garrett’s department continued to fail to make the material available. I contacted that person and said: ‘Look, I understand your frustration; we’re getting this story everywhere we go. But there is one upside: at least you got an assessment.’ He said, ‘What’s the problem?’ and I went through the problem with actually getting an assessment.

Right across Australia there are people who are qualified to do these assessments. In good faith they undertake the training. They invest money, they pay the fees to get registered and they undertake the courses that are required to secure the accreditation to be someone who can carry out that work. There are community organisations right across Australia helping with that process. I am grateful to my parliamentary colleague the member for Gippsland, Mr Darren Chester—and I will not mention the particular community organisation because they have asked me not to, but they are involved in training people for this green loans program. They point out that it is not cheap, but a qualified, properly trained, home assessment person is a condition, a fundamental starting point, to get a green loan. They are an organisation committed to sustainability and they thought they would get involved. They have taken on students to secure a certificate of achievement and then to be registered with an organisation that verifies the credentials of the assessor. They need a police check, a registration fee of 650 bucks, public liability indemnity insurance—another 750 bucks—the course itself, which costs $750-odd, and all that is involved with getting their accreditation. That is quite an outlay.

The organisation has now been told that there is a moratorium on having these appropriately trained and prepared people who have invested their money in becoming assessors. There is now a moratorium that says, ‘No, we’re not accepting any more assessors.’ This dictum from the minister’s department fell out of the sky, with all those involved in trying to implement this bungled program left holding the baby, incurring the expense and not being given the opportunity to do what they entered into in good faith on the strength of what the government asked them to do.

I feel very sorry for ABSA, the Association of Building Sustainability Assessors. They are the organisation charged with verification and certification of these home assessors. ABSA do that work on behalf of the Rudd Labor government and Minister Garrett. They are now in the firing line because, even though it is not their call to end registration of home assessors—that has been decreed from the department—they are at the pointy end having to face the music of people who have invested thousands of dollars to participate in this program, based on the false promises that that opportunity was available, even though they know, as everyone does, how bungled and troubled this whole program has been from day one.

To their credit, ABSA are allowing people to withdraw their applications if caught in this bind, a bind not of ABSA’s making. Alison Carmichael has been at pains to explain that they are caught in that squeeze but they are at least happy to work with people, where they can, to mitigate some of the expense, inconvenience and hardship of the bungled handling of this program. They are a not-for-profit organisation and they should not be stuck in the line of fire by Minister Garrett.

Minister Garrett needs to recognise that that is a problem in the program: the accreditation and the way in which people are appropriately qualified to carry out home sustainability assessments. There are people following in good faith his encouragement and his department’s encouragement to go down that pathway who are being completely done over by Minister
Garrett and his department in the way they are mishandling and bungling this program. So I feel sorry for Ms Carmichael. I recognise that she has had a difficult job dealing with the surge of interest in the program and the need for proper accreditation of appropriately qualified people, but now she is at the pointy end, when Minister Garrett and his department decide to turn the tap off and say ‘no more assessors’.

That is just the assessors. But, if you do happen to get certified and you happen to be in a position to carry out those assessments, what you need to do then is contact Prime Minister Rudd’s environment minister’s department—Minister Garrett’s department—and get on to their call centre to be allocated a job number. So, if you want to be paid, you need to get a job number first. Today 30 people are being laid off in an eastern Melbourne business set up to administer and implement this scheme. Thirty people are losing their jobs and that small business is facing going under because of the bungling of this scheme. Why? Because of this requirement to get a job allocation.

Let us do some very basic maths. Thirty assessors may be able to do four or five assessments a day. Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, you are quickly doing the maths there, but it is somewhere between 120 and 150 assessments a day. What if I said to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that to get a job number—remember, that one number that lets a single assessment take place, bearing in mind that this small business is geared up to do 120 to 150 a day—you would have to have someone sit on the phone for nearly two hours to get through to the call centre and talk to someone to get this elusive job number? You might think a two-hour wait to get job numbers for 120 to 150 jobs is just an inconvenience and is not so bad. Maybe, but what if I told you that you were rationed to five numbers per call? How many people do you need camped on phones all day, waiting up to two hours to get someone to talk to you, to get a maximum of five job numbers if you have a business that is looking to do 120 to 150 assessments a day? There is no business case model in the world that could make that work. But that is the bureaucratic bungling, misadventure and mismanagement that Minister Garrett is sitting over.

So what has happened? Thirty people are losing their jobs today in eastern Melbourne at ALPHAgreen. My thoughts are very much with all of them and their families as, in this difficult economic climate, they contemplate how they may find employment opportunities. Do you know what the real answer is? Fix the system. Fix the system, Minister Garrett. Why should he fix the system? Because he already has. Do you know what Fieldforce, the organisation based on a similar model, get to do? They get allocated a batch of job numbers: ‘Here is a batch, guys. Knock yourselves out. Fill in the details. Send them in by spreadsheets. We’ll do it that way so that you don’t have to spend all your time and employ an army of people camped on the phone, waiting to get a maximum of five job numbers after a two-hour wait, so you can go and do your home assessments.’ Do you know what ALPHAgreen and Mike and his team wanted to do? Just the same thing; to contact the department and outline the details. Do you think they got any help? No. ‘I told you: you can’t have the system that Fieldforce has.’ Why? There is no explanation: ‘You can’t have it.’ Thirty people today are out of work and a small business is going down because of ongoing mismanagement of this system.

I call on the Rudd Labor government and I call on Minister Garrett to get his funky moves happening and to get his butt-cheeks over to his department and get this fixed. This has been a bungled program from day one. There has been issue after issue emerging. It is costing jobs. It
is costing people their small businesses. He needs to get on with tackling these things. It is not because he does not know about them. People have gone out of their way to try and make him aware of these problems, because we are all committed to improving the sustainability of our nation. We would all like to see these opportunities embraced for homes. Everyone is keen to get involved, but the only obstacle is Minister Garrett and the mismanagement and bungling of this program. He should talk to Mike Stratell at ALPHAgreen. He should get on the phone today and say: ‘Mike, I am sorry I have caused you so much distress and I am sorry those 30 people have been laid off today. We will fix this.’ He could honestly say there are a lot of things to fix with this program: ‘We will fix this one because it’s costing jobs, it’s costing us small business and it’s further damaging the credibility of this program.’

I will move onto another sustainability program in the time that is available to me. Some years ago I pursued the vision of the southern solar city in the wonderful metropolis in Melbourne called Frankston. My heart skips a beat as I think of my home city. The Howard government had the Solar Cities program, and I had heard a lot of talk about having these solar cities in places where there is stacks of sun. We have stacks of love and many nice days in Melbourne but there is not as much sun as there is in some other cities. My argument was that we should have a southern solar city to prove that the photovoltaic technology and solar opportunities were effective and should be embraced even in the more temperate climates, with the more temperate citizens of Frankston city. We did not quite get the funding there, but we will persist. We will persist in a vision that says Frankston should be the southern solar city. It should embrace home sustainability opportunities like we have described that should be available under the bungled Rudd government program, but because of mismanagement it is harder than it should be. We can look at solar opportunities for electricity generation across a range of community uses. We can educate people about how they can make simple choices that improve their energy efficiency and the sustainability of their lifestyle, all of which combine to create practical emissions reductions.

That vision is alive. But do you know what I am faced with? I am faced with having to pursue this vision under the Rudd government’s so-called smart grid. Anyone who knows anything about smart grids will know they are wonderful technologies that are very important to the electricity sector to try to manage and balance fluctuations in energy supply and availability and to take account of renewable systems that may come in and out; for example, to let home appliances know that if you are a fridge and it is the middle of the night and nobody is likely to open the door for six hours, you probably do not need to fire up if you are one degree Celsius over what the normal fridge temperature would be. It is about using smart technology to link up these elements in the electricity generation, use and supply system.

It is an important vision. It is a funky term, too. It is so funky the Rudd Labor government have decided to pick up the term but not the concept. They have a smart grid program. There is $100 million to buy one community—one—a smart grid, so they say. I think 31 out of 35 energy companies said they had no ambition for smart grids like that just yet. They use it to diagnose faults in their systems and for workarounds when there is a fault. They use it to manage their own network and their supply obligations. The Rudd government, in true form, has the post-it note of smart grids without the contents sitting behind it.

But there is a bag of money there. I am supporting my community to get that bag of money to implement our southern solar city vision, mindful of the fact that it is a completely dishon-
est distortion of what smart grids are about in the way in which the Rudd government is implementing the program. We are bringing together all of those concepts of home sustainability assessments, weatherisation, smarter use of technologies, replacing old and inefficient appliances and looking at renewable energy and photovoltaic generation. There are all of these good things, none of which are dependent upon or are an essential component of a smart grid. But that is the brand of the program. Isn’t it funny how something as important as the southern solar city and the concept of more sustainable urban environments gets pursued through a complete misuse of a funky term that the Rudd government will now use to say that they are so cool they are into smart grids, whereas they have a program that does not even require a smart grid to access the money.

This is my dilemma: I will support that project because it carries forward a vision I articulated some years ago for the southern solar city based on Frankston city. But it is under a smart grids program where there is nothing smart about the smart grids program, because it does not actually talk about smart grids. That is just what we are faced with, with the Rudd Labor government: we will get the spin of the smart grid without actually having a smart grid. Isn’t that cunning? Isn’t that brilliant? ‘We are all about smart grids!’ ‘Have you got one?’ ‘No, no—we’ve got a program that’s called smart grids, and all the stuff you do on it is completely unrelated to a smart grid but we’re calling it a smart grid.’ Isn’t that the greatest thing? How cunning. Isn’t that sweet? Isn’t that so quintessentially Rudd Labor government? Use the brand and the funky terminology, look so future orientated that they will talk about stuff in 2050 and not worry about the next year. Use a brand that has nothing to do with, and requires nothing that is related to, a smart grid. Isn’t that just cunning? Who could have thought it? What cunning soul would have thought of that?

In the last few seconds that are available to me, I will talk about community infrastructure projects.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 11.05 am to 11.29 am

Mr BILLSON—In terms of the local and regional community infrastructure projects, how can the Rudd Labor government go past building a sea wall at the Frankston Safe Boat Harbour, a commitment that I made for the previous Howard government? I urge a close examination of that project.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (11.29 am)—I know this place is usually a very crowded place but I would like to acknowledge that my partner, Zoe, and my daughter have been able to fit in through the madding crowds to listen to my speech today and I am very grateful for that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—They are very welcome.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 seek to appropriate funding for government decisions included in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and decisions taken since the release of that outlook. There are three particular areas that I would like to concentrate on. One area is health and the $45.2 million that has gone to the H1N1 influenza virus pandemic response from the government, and I will talk more generally about the Rudd government’s response to many of the issues that are plaguing us in terms of health. I would also like to concentrate on the $40 mil-
lion of additional funding for the General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme and talk a little bit about the Rudd government’s approach to keeping Australians in jobs and the measures that we have taken to that end. I would also like to concentrate on the $165 million that has been set aside for the establishment for the Local Government Reform Fund and important local government issues, particularly in my electorate, and the effects that they have on the community.

The government is proposing to provide the Department of Health and Ageing with $45.2 million in response to the H1N1 influenza virus pandemic. The funding seeks to manage this pandemic and to enhance preparedness for any future pandemics by supporting such activities as the storage, compounding and distribution of antivirals and personal protective equipment; the production, processing and distribution of immunisation consent forms; and the conduct of an immunisation awareness campaign. As 15 January there have been 37,569 confirmed cases of the pandemic and 191 deaths reported in Australia.

While it is currently reassuring to know that the influenza-like illness presentation rates in Australia are generally low at the moment and consistent with levels usually seen at this time of year, we must remember that the pandemic is still affecting other parts of the world. As at 10 January 2010, the World Health Organisation regional offices reported at least 13,554 deaths associated with the pandemic worldwide. Pandemic influenza transmission continues in many parts of the world, though it is declining and it has passed its peak except in some focal areas. The most intense areas of the pandemic influenza transmission are currently in parts of North Africa, South Asia and east and south-eastern Europe. In the Southern Hemisphere sporadic cases of the pandemic influenza continue to be reported without evidence of sustained community transmission.

It is important that we have taken these steps as a government in preparing Australia for this. It is also an important warning for people to go out and avail themselves of the government’s vaccination programs. In a few months we will be coming back into the start of the flu season. We do not know whether this virus, when it comes around a second time, will be more deadly in its effect. The best way we can respond to this is by making sure that our families are vaccinated. This is something that protects the community as a whole from this particular influenza virus. It is something the Rudd government moved quickly to address, and it is a very important initiative.

However, when we look at the achievements the Rudd government has made in health generally, it is worth highlighting the difference between what we are doing as a government and what occurred previously under the Howard government. I think it is particularly important when we look at who is now the opposition leader, what his former role was and what his record was as health minister. When Mr Abbott was the Minister for Health and Ageing of this country he presided over a regime where he was responsible for ripping $1 billion out of our health system.

While we hear frequently from the opposition leader about the state of our hospitals, for four years he was the minister responsible for the national government’s policy and the national government’s response in relation to what would happen with health in this country. His response was, ‘Let’s rip $1 billion out of our health system,’ because philosophically those on the other side do not believe in our public health system. They do not believe in Medicare;
they never have. So it is entirely consistent with the approach that they have taken over many, many years to try and run down the Commonwealth’s commitment to health.

But they did worse than that as well. They put a cap on GP places. They put a cap of 600 on GP places Australia wide. What this meant was that there were fewer doctors being trained, coming out and being available for all of our communities right around Australia. In my electorate of Dobell—and the member for Mayo’s electorate probably suffered the same problem—we had only one doctor for every 2,000 residents. We were having difficulty attracting doctors and keeping doctors because there simply were not enough being trained, because in 2004 the former government decided to put a cap on the number of doctors being trained, the number of GP places. One of the very important things that this government has done is to lift that cap. We have lifted it so that there are many, many more doctors being trained. Already in my electorate we have gone from having one in 2,000 to one in 1,500. While that is still not ideal, it is a far better situation than what we had before.

In terms of health generally, the Rudd government, rather than rip out $1 billion, will invest $64 billion in the hospital and health system across the country over the next five years. That is a 50 per cent increase on the previous agreement made by the Liberal Party. This is not rhetoric. This is not spin. This is real change. This is a 50 per cent increase. It is $64 billion which is affecting people’s lives every day in terms of the way in which we deliver health care across the country.

We have invested $600 million in our elective surgery program. In stage 1 we committed to a target of 25,000 extra elective surgeries. In 2008 there were more than 41,000 additional procedures delivered around the country. These are people who had been waiting on waiting lists for hip replacements and the like. We were able to get 41,000 additional procedures done. These are real changes that are affecting people’s lives, making our health system better than it was before. These are changes that mean that we have a better health system two years into the Rudd government than we had before we were elected in 2007.

We have invested $750 million to take pressure off emergency departments, and this is very important, particularly for electorates like my own. Wyong Hospital has the fifth busiest emergency department in New South Wales, and the money that is being spent on resources for our emergency departments is absolutely critical in making sure that people are seen in a more timely manner when they turn up at our emergency departments.

In terms of health infrastructure, we are investing $3.2 billion in 36 major projects across our hospital and medical research institutes, including $1.2 billion for world-class cancer centres. This is not spin. This is not rhetoric. This is not promising to do something and sitting on our hands. These are real changes and real dollars that are going out there for vitally needed health infrastructure, to make sure that our hospitals continue to provide the world-class services that they do, to make sure that as many people as possible are seen and to take the pressure off our health systems, which of course continue to struggle under an ageing population.

The Rudd government has committed $275 million to help construct 34 GP superclinics across the country. Now, $275 million is a lot of money, but because of the way in which this scheme operates it is actually much more money that is being spent, because we are encouraging the private sector to partner in these particular arrangements.
I will talk about the GP superclinic that is in my electorate on the northern part of the Central Coast. We are providing a little over $2 million for the GP superclinic. The successful tenderer who is building this GP superclinic is putting in $16 million. That is $16 million that they would not have actually put in except for this program, so the good citizens of Dobell are getting the advantage of an over $18 million investment in a GP superclinic through the significant but smaller investment that has been put in by this government. That is a very appropriate way to spend health money, because we are spending public money but encouraging the private sector to partner with us so that much more money is spent and there are much greater outcomes.

A temporary GP superclinic is already up and running in my electorate. There are two doctors, a physiotherapist and a dietician. It has an ear clinic as well. While they are at their temporary location, that is just the start of what they will have. They have already purchased the land for the final location, which is Warnervale, a very fast-growing suburb of my electorate. At Warnervale there will be this $18 million spent on a GP superclinic which will provide a vast array of services for the growing population of the northern part of the Central Coast. The successful tenderer have been so impressed with the model of a GP superclinic that, on their own initiative outside of this, they have decided that they will build a second GP superclinic without federal money. They are going to spend a further $14 million. So for our investment of a little over $2 million we are now getting $30 million being spent. The successful tenderer, who already own a doctors surgery on the Central Coast, will go from employing just over 20 doctors to employing just over 60 doctors, so just in terms of GPs there will be a gain of over 40 doctors on the Central Coast, let alone the fact that GP superclinics are about providing all the other health professionals to meet the need for physiotherapy, hearing and psychology services and all those sorts of important allied health services that are a part of this particular model. So we are going from a situation where under the Howard years we had one doctor for every 2,000 residents to a situation of one for every 1,500 residents because we have started to increase the number of places for GPs being trained. We have been directly intervening, in terms of the investment that this government has been making, to make sure that more doctors and more allied health professionals are providing services on the Central Coast.

This government is investing $1.1 billion in training more doctors, nurses and other health professionals. This is the single biggest investment in the health workforce ever made by the Australian government. This is not spin. This is not talking about something that we might do in the future. This is actually acting now, spending $1.1 billion to try to get more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals trained and out there so that they can provide the sorts of services that we need to have provided.

Turning to dental health, the Rudd government has committed a total of $650 million for two dental programs. The Teen Dental Plan, which was committed to last year, provides a $150 annual payment to eligible families. To the end of December 258,203 teenagers had received a dental check-up under this program, with 7,598 dentists, or 70 per cent of dentists, providing this service. Unfortunately, due to the opposition’s position, the reintroduction of the Commonwealth dental program, which they axed straight after coming into government in 1996, has been blocked in the Senate. At the last election we promised its reintroduction and we have a mandate to bring it back in so that those people who have difficulty in affording dental care will get access to dental care under that program. That is a disgrace and the oppo-
osition need to look at the people who are being affected by this and make sure that they get out of the way, letting our government get on with caring for people’s health generally and their dental health in particular.

These appropriation bills also go to GEERS. One of the great differences between this side of the House and the other side of the House is our approach to jobs in Australia. On this side of the House we have been responsible for putting in place stimulus packages that are about creating jobs out in every community, and we have seen the effect of the stimulus package on our unemployment rates compared to those overseas. What these stimulus packages have done is ensure that there are jobs out there in local communities. The best of these schemes is clearly the investment in our schools through the education revolution and the building of much-needed capital works programs in all of our primary schools throughout the nation.

In my electorate, where extensive building is going on in all of the primary schools, the number of locals who have been employed because of the way this scheme has been set up is absolutely outstanding. I congratulate Bovis Lend Lease, the overarching consultants, for the approach that they have taken, particularly in a high-unemployment area like the Central Coast, where jobs have always been at a premium. We are seeing apprentices who have been laid off for two or three years and who are mid-way through their apprenticeships being taken back on and completing their apprenticeships on these job sites. Not only does that provide the employment and the stimulus for the economy that has seen us as one of the few economies to grow and to create rather than lose jobs during the global financial crisis, but importantly it has also built this vital social infrastructure at all of these primary schools. That has been a great thing.

In the short time that I have remaining I would like to highlight the appropriations in relation to the government’s Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. I have two councils in my electorate, Gosford council and Wyong council, and there has been considerable money spent through this program in relation to particular projects that have affected their local communities. The Gosford council has been able to build new play equipment, soft-fall areas, shade structures and picnic facilities at a couple of playgrounds. It has turned what were destitute playgrounds into busy hives of community interaction, with families going there all the time because of those resources. The same has happened at Canton Beach on Tuggerah Lakes, where Wyong council has constructed an all-access playground with additional picnic tables and barbecue facilities. Again, that is being put to great use. Wyong council has been able to build six new netball courts at its busy Baker Park complex. This not only provides much needed sporting areas for those people who play netball in my electorate but also will allow the Wyong council to host state championships because they now have the number and standard of courts required.

While all of these projects, which are worthwhile projects in their own right, have been taking place, they have been taking place with local people being employed. So we have had the dual effect of providing much needed local community infrastructure and, importantly, of creating local jobs. In an area such as mine, which traditionally has unemployment at two or three per cent higher than the national average and where employment is in areas that are most vulnerable to economic downturns, these sorts of programs have been absolutely vital. The Rudd government is about providing real money for real areas of major importance to people in terms of health, jobs and local government. These are not issues that you can spin
and pretend are going to be addressed. You actually have to really do something. This government has really done things, and it stands in stark contrast to the record of the previous government. I commend these bills to the House.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (11.49 am)—It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010 following the member for Dobell, whose contribution is one I always follow with great interest. We will, I think, be working closer after a recent phone call I had about a committee that we are on, so in the next little while we will enjoy each other’s company even more than we have in the past. I look forward to finding out more about the member for Dobell’s past and what he got up to in those days.

These bills are an opportunity to discuss the appropriations of the government more broadly. It has been the tradition in this place that we can talk about the appropriations of the government and the programs and policies that they have been implementing in what is now just over two years, and of course we are now not too far away from the next general election, which will be held some time later this year. In the national parliament Deputy Speaker Georganas will of course know that we have a state election in South Australia in the coming weeks and I think a few people will be surprised at the outcome.

We are talking today about how the Rudd government is travelling after two years, particularly in relation to the management of the economy as it gets to the appropriations of the nation’s taxpayers’ money that we in this place spend. Yesterday we heard a ministerial statement by the Prime Minister telling his story about how he has handled the economy in the past 12 or 18 months since the global financial crisis began in September 2008—it really began, probably, a little bit earlier than that, in late 2007, with the subprime crisis developing in the United States; it did obviously have a flow-on effect throughout the world—it sent shockwaves throughout the world—and governments in different countries responded in different ways. In some ways, they responded in a more collegiate fashion than has probably happened in the past and that obviously has some good aspects to it, but it also raises some questions.

We heard the Prime Minister’s version of how he believes he has managed the economy and the effect he has had on the economy. We saw, I think, a Prime Minister taking a great deal of credit for the economic performance of the country, which is obviously something prime ministers and governments like to do from time to time. But the problem with the speech yesterday is that it stands in contrast to the facts. The Prime Minister claimed yesterday—and the member for Dobell supported this claim in his contribution a short time ago—that the government’s stimulus packages were the reason, and I say ‘the reason’ very clearly, that the economy had performed so well in comparison to the rest of the world. We are in growth, unemployment has remained relatively low—off a low base—and our debt position in comparison with the rest of the world is reasonably good when compared to the United Kingdom and the United States. His claim was that the huge amounts of money spent—$23 billion in handing out $900 cheques to everyone in the country; $17 billion on school halls, which I think has increased by a couple of billion dollars from the initial announcement, but what is a couple of billion between friends these days!—were the reason that unemployment stayed low and growth continued. He claimed that it was because of the decisions of the government that has been the case. The truth is of course that the stimulus package has had a very minor effect on the economic performance.
The truth is that our economy has performed well because it now relies very much on the performance of the South-East Asian economies—the tiger economies of China, India and the economies throughout the Asian region. Those countries are also performing quite well. China had a slight dip to, I think, $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent growth for one quarter, but it is now back to its raging 10 per cent growth, which it is expected to have for some time to come yet. It is introducing into its middle class some 200 million people a year—they are figures that we struggle to comprehend—and therefore their desire for our resources has never been stronger.

In Australia we stand on the border of a massive upswing and a massive opportunity for our country, particularly in South Australia—Deputy Speaker Georganas, this will please you particularly—where we have a real opportunity to be part of a golden era as far as our economy goes if we are able to get the expansion of the Olympic Dam and other sites going without any problems. Those economies in India and China are growing so quickly that the desire for resources, uranium in particular, to help spark that growth is such that we have a real opportunity to be part of that story.

So really what we have seen over the last 18 months has been the effect of a structural change in our economy that has occurred over the last 10 years or so. Whereas 10 or 15 years ago we were very reliant on the United States and Europe, that has changed significantly to the point where the downturn in the United States has not affected us to anywhere near the degree that we first thought it would. It certainly affected people in Sydney and Melbourne in the financial services arena. There were quite substantial job losses there, as there was around the world, but more broadly the employment conditions have stayed very strong. They were coming off a very low base, of course—the Howard government left the Rudd government four per cent unemployment; they were extraordinary record lows—but unemployment has moved up slightly. All increases in unemployment are unwelcome because they bring problems arising from the human impact.

We now have an economy which is performing very well on the back of very strong growth conditions in South-East Asia. That is the reason; it is not because of the stimulus package at all. It is very difficult to find anyone who actually supports the Prime Minister’s contention that it is all because of his brilliance in developing a policy where you hand out 900 bucks to everyone and borrow $23 billion to do it.

I have encapsulated the reason that the Australian economy is performing quite well. It is a great story. It has huge potential for South Australia. We will soon overtake the boom in Western Australia and ours will be the growth state of the country. I am sure that Deputy Speaker Georganas will agree with me there. That growth is a great thing because it means increased revenue for the states, which means better services and so forth. I think we have a real opportunity there.

We are in such a great position because of the structural changes made over the last 10 or 15 years. I do pay some credit here to former Prime Minister Paul Keating and former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, as well, of course, as former Prime Minister John Howard. The three of them together showed real economic leadership in the way that they were able to change the structure of the Australian economy—I think Paul Kelly points this out very well in his book—so that we were able to participate better and take better advantage of the opportunities from the growth in China, India and the South-East Asian tigers.
This brings us to a couple of the dangers that are on the horizon for the Australian economy, or issues which could help restrict that growth. The first one is something I made a contribution about today in The Punch, the very well-read website run by News Limited, on an issue which was identified very well by Matthew Stevens in the Weekend Australian: the plans in the Henry tax review for a federal resources rent tax. I know there are members on the other side who understand the potential implications of such a tax on the booming resource sector in Western Australia and on so much potential that we have in South Australia—in particular, in Olympic Dam. We saw in the Weekend Australian a story by Matthew Stevens about BHP quietly sending the message out that, if we do have this federal rent resources tax recommended by the Henry review, we can kiss Olympic Dam goodbye. To South Australians, that is a real concern. It is a real and present danger to our potential to write our own ticket for a very long time. Olympic Dam, members understand, is potentially the biggest hole ever dug by humans. It has something like a trillion dollars worth of resources in it. It will have a life span of something like 60 or 70 years. Environmental studies of it are going on at the moment. BHP are committed to the investment. They have challenges with water and electricity; they are working through those at the moment, with some help from the South Australian government. They would probably have increased help from the South Australian government if a Liberal government had been elected in late March, but we will not get into that today. So there is real potential.

A real danger coming out of the Henry tax review is a new federal tax on the mining industry which will create huge difficulties for potential growth in South Australia. As we know from the briefings from BHP, it will potentially stop the Olympic Dam development. Why would you put a new tax on the resources sector at a federal level? Because you have such a large debt. That is ultimately the big problem that the stimulus package will create: a debt burden on future generations because the spend was too big, too much upfront. We are going to see, unfortunately, the impact of these decisions. As we know, Labor governments spend too much and then tax too much to catch up. That is the real danger. Hopefully, the South Australian government and Premier Mike Rann, although he has other challenges on his plate, can focus on this issue and make very clear to the Prime Minister in the lead-up to the South Australian election that this would be a bad decision and would damage our economy enormously.

The second aspect which is potentially going to have an impact on the growth of the Australian economy and the opportunities for the Australian economy at the moment is the increasing industrial activity in Western Australia and in other parts of the county. In Western Australia, the big unions are back in town. They have been given an adrenalin boost with a massive injection from the Fair Work laws, which began operating in large part on 1 January. They are using those laws to create the industrial havoc which unfortunately damaged our economy so much and so often in the early to mid-1980s, and again early in the 1990s until former Prime Minister Paul Keating realised that we needed to start to change this culture if we were going to take advantage of these great opportunities in the future.

You will have seen stories in the Australian earlier this week about unions forcing a $50,000 pay hike: ‘Woodside dispute threatens to widen’; ‘Business to appeal against a “flawed” Fair Work ruling’; Paddy Crumlin from the Maritime Union saying, ‘Only dinosaurs work harder for more pay’; and ‘Sides dig in despite return to work at Pluto’. Pluto is the pro-
ject which the Prime Minister was so proud to take credit for last year, and now Woodside are engaged in a very nasty industrial dispute about the quality of hotel rooms for the fly-in fly-out workers. If there was a bigger signal that the unions are back in town—

Mr Gray interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS—I am talking about the appropriation bill, Parliamentary Secretary. The tradition has been that you can talk more broadly on challenges for the economy. I would have thought industrial relations was a challenge for the economy. You are the parliamentary secretary for Western Australia, are you not? Big strikes are up—and this is the big difference here. It is going to create that resource bottleneck, which Glenn Stevens talks about, that you do not want to create in the economy.

We need to have a balanced look at these laws, and I think the Deputy Prime Minister has gone too far with the Fair Work laws. The leader of our party has said very clearly that in some aspects the previous government went too far on workplace relations. Unfortunately, what we have seen is the Deputy Prime Minister paying back significant debts—and we saw some of those debts earlier this week with the donation figures in the papers. She has taken this—

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS—I will take that interjection!

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS—When our leader was former minister for workplace relations, I think he was part of the government that created two million jobs. We do have a real challenge in Western Australia, in particular, and in other places with the way that these Fair Work laws are operating. What we are seeing is that they are fair for the unions but not all that fair for the Australian economy.

I will touch on some specifics relating to this bill, namely the appropriations of our country and the payments to Fair Work Australia, which is the new Industrial Relations Commission—the new umpire in the system—and how it is interpreting what were always very vague rules in relation to how good faith bargaining would work. The act was written in such a way that it leaves open for interpretation how the good faith bargaining laws will operate.

At the time of the bill, it was very difficult to point explicitly to how these things would work until there were decisions. Now we are seeing decisions. That is the important aspect of the operations of these laws. What we are seeing now is that the good faith bargaining provisions of the Fair Work laws will be the next legislative instrument that the unions will use to get back into every workplace that they possibly can. There was a dispute just yesterday about this. Fair Work Australia lifted the bar on notice requirements. What they have done is made it far easier for unions for walk back into work sites where they are not welcome, create disputes, get themselves back in the picture, increase membership and lift up industrial disputes—which are the bottlenecks that Glenn Stevens identifies are a real risk for Australia’s growth and for interest rates and which will restrict our ability to be part of this golden age of economic opportunity that China and the South East Asian economies are producing.

The Fair Work changes by the government are very much at the heart of the dangers to the Australian economy. Make no mistake: we stand at the edge of a huge opportunity for this country. We are at the beginning of an upswing the likes of which we probably have never
seen before if the predicted growth levels for China come true. Our resource sector is doing extraordinarily well, as is our services sector. We have intergenerational challenges and so forth, but we have real opportunity.

These laws will potentially reduce our opportunity to do well out of this. These laws are a clear and present danger for our economy. We have seen that in recent days with the stories in the Australian and in the rulings from Fair Work Australia. They have gone too far. It would be wise of those on the other side who understand the economy better than the Deputy Prime Minister to reel them back in and get back to a fair balance, particularly in relation to industrial disputes.

Two years on and at the beginning of an election campaign, we see an economy that is travelling very well because of the hard work of Australian business and its workers. There are some real dangers because of changes that the government has made. There are some real dangers because of the level of debt that the government has entered into to fund its spending. That is going to create challenges for us into the future which we did not need necessarily to have. There has been misspending; badly focused spending. That has caused some of the great difficulties and challenges that we now face.

Then there is the Henry review of tax, which we have not seen. The government will not let anyone into it. We are waiting with bated breath to see what is in it. We have heard rumours about what may or may not be in it. But those on the other side who have a genuine interest in the mining industry in this country will be very concerned about this potential federal resource rent tax and the implications that it will have. Anyone from the mining industry will tell you that it will stop projects going ahead and stop economy growth and opportunity. It will do so in states like South Australia, which sits at the edge of a golden era of opportunity. If it is recommended I hope that the government sees that it is a bad move. We could know today, but the Treasurer will not let us in on the secret of what is in this review. We wait with bated breath to see what comes out of that.

From our side of politics, this year we will see a very forward-thinking and positive agenda as far as management of the economy goes. I know that our new leader is very focused on the economy and how we can make it better and stronger. We will see some very good plans released in the near future about what the next Liberal government’s approach to managing the economy will be. His record in government was outstanding. He was part of the team that created over two million jobs, real wage increases of 25 per cent and real opportunity for future generations. That is what we need from the government in this country, rather than huge spending, waste and wrong priorities that will put pressure on our budget into the future.

Mr Gray (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia) (12.09 pm)—I rise to speak in favour of the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and cognate bill Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. In so doing I will just pick up one point made by the member opposite—that is, potential recommendations by the Henry review in the context of the resources sector. These suggestions are all in the media and simply have the status of speculation. In the context of a resources rent tax, I know a lot about, and have worked in, an industry that works under the only resource rent tax regime that exists in Australia, and there is not one single oil or gas project in our country that has been held back by the petroleum resource rent tax regime. It was a tax system that was created in the early 1980s and worked very effectively to remove a whole range of ad hoc and ad valorem taxes and replace them
with an excellent tax, regarded as being one of the best in the world. It is a tax which re-
mained untouched by the Howard government, a tax which remained untouched by Peter
Costello. It is a tax which did nothing but quietly hum away, generating substantial revenue
for Australian taxpayers, who are the resource owners. The beauty of the resources rent tax
structure is that, by its nature, it cannot compromise whether or not a project goes ahead. It is
a tax whose simple beauty is that it cannot affect whether or not a project will go forward.
Whether or not Henry recommends such a tax for Australia is yet to be seen; whether or not
the government accedes to that recommendation is yet to be seen.

This debate is a good debate. It is a pity that the member opposite is so poorly informed,
but I am very happy to spend time with him to explain to him that in fact this tax, which has
worked so seamlessly and effortlessly for 25 years or more, has generated substantial revenue
for governments of all colours and persuasions and has not been amended in its nature at all.

We stand at this point looking at this legislation and knowing full well that we can be opti-
mistic about Australia’s future. We can be optimistic because we have a government which
has responded appropriately and in the right way to the global financial crisis, creating the
right kind of investment in our community and keeping our economy strong, and supporting
employment and the communities that otherwise would have suffered the horrible force and
brunt of unemployment that would have come Australia’s way with the global financial crisis,
which did travel through the United States and Europe, through Britain and through the coun-
tries of most of our trading partners. The sheer intelligence of the government’s response has
been clearly missed by those opposite. But it is important for us to point out that we now have
communities that are affected by unemployment and that we do need to continue to press the
case for the stimulus, and we need to do that both to protect our communities and to protect
our economy and its skill base.

One of the worst impacts of the global financial crisis in Australia in 2009 was in fact a
winding back of apprentice numbers and the training of people for the resources sector in my
state and in other resource rich states. It is important that we do keep our skills performance
and training measures up to scratch to ensure we do have enough skilled workers to furnish
that growing economy. It is great to see South Australia as a powerhouse of the resources sec-
tor, joining Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales in leading the Australian
mining sector’s recovery.

In this legislation $14.9 million has been reclassified as part of the payments which are
structured under the East Kimberley Development Package, payments which are made to the
Shire of Wyndham and East Kimberley, a shire which is essential to the delivery of the East
Kimberley Development Package announced jointly by the Prime Minister and the Premier of
Western Australia, Colin Barnett, on 3 July last year, in Kununurra. The East Kimberley De-
velopment Package builds on the work of several governments in Western Australia to create
an outstanding agreement with the Mirrawong Gadjurong people both to allow for agricultural
and horticultural development and to ensure appropriate compensation to traditional owners
and Indigenous people in the Kimberley area.

Importantly, the social investment package, the East Kimberley Development Package, was
constructed in close cooperation with the government of Western Australia—with Premier
Colin Barnett, Minister Brendon Grylls, health minister Kim Hames and education minister
Liz Constable—to ensure a hand-in-glove approach to supporting infrastructure in this region with that newly elected state government.

The $14.9 million that has been reclassified is delivered through the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley, demonstrating the great partnership that exists now at all levels of government to ensure that the social disadvantage in the East Kimberley is addressed by substantial investments in infrastructure that match the substantial delivery of programs funded by the state government. The package forms part of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and was developed in response to the unique economic and social circumstances of the East Kimberley, and it will contribute to the Australian government’s national-building agenda, providing a stimulus to the economy as well as addressing Indigenous disadvantage.

The East Kimberley Development Package specifically supports the region through investing in social and common-use infrastructure. Since being launched, the Australian government has worked with the East Kimberley community and the Western Australian government, the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley and two Indigenous organisations to further develop the planning and design of 29 individual projects. Project plans have been submitted for nearly all projects, based on designs prepared with extensive community consultation.

On 22 January, I had the pleasure of joining the Wyndham East Kimberley shire president, Fred Mills, and the member for Kalgoorlie, Mr Barry Haase, to officially open the Wyndham swimming pool. The opening took place on a Friday evening, as a thunderstorm was gathering and lightning and the wind were gathering around us. Both the member for Kalgoorlie and I had great pleasure in watching that pool be opened, watching the kids of the community play in that pool and noting that it was originally opened in 1966 as part of the post-Olympic push to deliver pools to communities across the country. Now why was that particular 44-year-old facility important? Because the only other swimming facility, down the road, is in the river at Wyndham, which is populated by extremely large crocodiles, a massive current and tidal drift and is simply unsafe for any recreational use by swimmers, divers or the like. The swimming pool is a critically important piece of community infrastructure in Wyndham.

I was interested to learn that even the incredible amounts of rain the Wyndham pool will receive in the wet season—some evenings up to two inches, in the old measure, 50 millimetres in the new measure—will not affect the functioning of the pool. The water in that swimming pool, the whole 25 metre by six lane pool and the two adjacent kids pools, is turned over every three hours.

While the $950,000 that we contributed to that particular project is relatively small, an extremely small component of the nearly $200 million which is the East Kimberley Development Package, it is evidence of the strength and integrity of the package and of the cooperation that exists between the Australian government, the state government of Western Australia and the local government authorities. It is evidence of the strength of working together to deliver community identified needs. The Commonwealth funds were supported by $388,000 from the Western Australian government’s Department of Sport and Recreation and $106,000 of in-kind contributions from the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley. It is evidence of the strength of employing local labour and encouraging Indigenous employment. Of the 60-odd people who worked on the project, 41 were local and 10 were Indigenous. It is evidence of the strength of this project that leaving an enduring piece of community infrastructure for genera-
tions to come will be both enjoyed and celebrated and will once again become part of the fabric of Wyndham.

This is just one of many projects currently underway or in the planning stages through the East Kimberley. Construction has commenced on projects such as upgrades to the Wyndham health facilities, with the hospital component complete and the construction of staff housing now beginning. This is important because it will allow us to bring into Wyndham specialists and medical professionals—from Perth, principally—who will be housed in appropriate accommodation in Wyndham and thus be able to carry out their professional skills to the advantage of the local community, knowing full well that they have got great, secure and safe accommodation which will allow them to practise their professional skills to the best of their ability.

We also have improvements to the residential rehabilitation facility near Wyndham. This facility is effectively there to assist local people who are in the process of rehabilitation from the curse of alcohol, the effect of which in the East Kimberley area is truly caustic and truly damaging to the social fabric there. We also have upgrades to the Kununurra airport and the patient transfer facilities at that airport.

The Western Australian government also recently awarded contracts for construction of 23 dwellings in Kununurra and Wyndham, and a tender is currently out for construction of five more dwellings. Community consultations are progressing for the more complex projects of the Kununurra Hospital expansion and the redevelopment of the Kununurra education precinct.

There has been tremendous involvement of the community in designs for the Wyndham Community Jetty, which will be an important community asset. The jetty currently sits on a pontoon on the Wyndham River. It is clearly an important community asset but is also unsafe in any difficult weather conditions—and, given my reference earlier to the nature of that river and its occupants, the crocodiles—getting a good, safe community jetty in place will be an important addition to community amenity in Wyndham.

A key aspect of the East Kimberley development package is the promotion of Indigenous employment opportunities. These opportunities have already begun to be realised as construction is gearing up. I am told that, of the first 12 participants to go through pre-employment apprenticeships and training with Kimberley Group Training, 100 per cent of them are local Indigenous people. Funding for the salaries of and mentoring support for 20 new local apprentices will increase the availability of skilled labour in the region for years to come.

The project planning and design work done to date mean that a series of projects will commence shortly. All projects funded under the package are scheduled to be completed by June 2012. The package is a fantastic example of the strength of all levels of government working together. It is an example of the importance of all levels of government working together in Northern Australia to deliver outstanding outcomes. Over the course of the last few years, observers of governance structures in Northern Australia have often pointed out how weak they are. In many ways, the response of the government of Western Australia to getting it right in the East Kimberley—and the response of the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley to its challenges to get right governance, decision making and project delivery—gives us hope that the delivery of projects in this area will be enhanced by much better governance systems and control.
It is not hard to see that Northern Australia, over the course of the last 30 years—and this is certainly not a partisan observation—has been marred by governments from the south of this country, whether in Perth, Canberra or Brisbane, simply shouting instructions to Northern Australia and not having governance structures in Northern Australia that can be responsive. Government in Australia has tended to work on a south-north basis, whereas governance in Northern Australia is a more local phenomenon that does require investment, capability building and a cooperative approach from the Australian and state and local governments.

With that, I would like to thank my state colleague the Hon. Brendon Grylls MLA and Shire President Fred Mills for their tireless efforts to get the East Kimberley development package off the ground and to deliver results in a short time frame. I also pay my regards to Peter Stubbs, who is the chief executive officer of the Ord expansion project and former chief executive officer of the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley, for the work that he has done to prioritise projects, to stand by the tough decisions that that local government authority has had to make, and also to create the right structures to deliver projects on time.

I am often fond of saying that, in regional development and regional Australia, people who have a grumpy sense of self-reliance are so much better at understanding their needs and at looking at politicians from our town of Canberra and making a pretty quick assessment as to which ones are speed humps and which ones are really going to help. I look forward to attending more local launches of projects in the East Kimberley and throughout Northern Australia, and also to catching up with the member for Kalgoorlie when he is up in the Kimberley carrying out the work that he does for his constituents. In conclusion, I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Melham) adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (12.25 pm)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

OzHelp WA

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (12.26 pm)—I take this opportunity to speak of and praise OzHelp WA. Before I do so, I would like to give what I am sure is a common view of the construction industry. Most people who have not worked in that industry would agree that a 7 am start is early but it would be offset by a mid-afternoon finish. The work is heavy and the ability to work at heights would also be required. It would appear that it is fairly well-paid—if not as an apprentice, then once trade qualified they would do pretty well. It is not a bad sort of lifestyle if that is your thing. I have met plenty of apprentices and tradesmen and they often have a healthy disposable income. Overall they seem to be doing pretty well in Western Australia, and that is great.

Last week, however, I was talking to a board member of OzHelp WA who told me that the suicide mortality rates in the construction industry are staggering—75 per cent higher than the average Australian male rate. It has been reported that from 1998 to 2004 the rate of possible suicides was around 43 per 100,000. Contrast that with the 2002 national suicide mortality rate in Australia of 11.8 deaths per 100,000. Clearly there is a need for action to address this terrible statistic. In recognition of this need, in 2002 the OzHelp Foundation was established. OzHelp is an early intervention suicide prevention and capacity-building program designed to
address the industry’s needs, particularly given the number of apprentices, trainees and other workers employed in the sector.

In April 2009 OzHelp WA commenced operations in Western Australia. I would also add that I am very pleased that OzHelp has collocated with the West Australian Group Training Scheme at their premises in Wangara, within my electorate of Cowan. The Chief Executive Officer of OzHelp is Julian Gimpel, who is very well qualified, with degrees in social work, counselling and family therapy. OzHelp is supported by a number of organisations and businesses that have recognised the unique challenges of their industry and the need to look after their workforce. As with OzHelp elsewhere, their focus is about prevention and equipping apprentices and other workers with the skills they need, particularly in terms of self-management and lifestyle.

It is clear that OzHelp and CEO Julian Gimpel can do the job, but they are constantly challenged by a lack of resources with which to do their work. They are funded in part by industry subsidies and sponsorships, but I would also like to see a federal grant to help OzHelp WA in the same way that OzHelp ACT and Tasmania have received grants in the past. I have written to the Minister for Health and Ageing to assist OzHelp WA and to meet with the CEO and a board member so that they can outline the deep needs that we have in Western Australia. I would also say to the minister that, as Western Australia drags this nation back to prosperity, this is the sort of investment that will help maintain the momentum. With a federal grant, OzHelp will be able to extend their programs such as the Life Skills Tool Box, a nationally accredited course assisting apprentices with their confidence through communication, budgeting and dealing with bullying in the workplace, and using 12 four-hour modules to provide the training. The tool box is being piloted in Western Australia with 100 apprentices, including in-class training and on-site field officer support visits.

Of course OzHelp also has a suicide risk identification intervention program, with field officers and supervisors. I understand that OzHelp WA has recently begun working with the ApprentiCentre in Western Australia to provide general awareness training to its entire metro and regional field officer team. I should also mention OzBBQ, the core outreach and follow-up platform for OzHelp WA. Field officers provide free on-site health promotion and awareness-raising activities as well as the food.

I have great confidence in OzHelp WA and I know that other members in this place also have confidence in OzHelp in their states and territories. Yet ultimately this good work must be funded. The construction industry is contributing, but, as in other places, there is a need for federal support. I encourage the Minister for Health and Ageing to sit down with OzHelp WA and then support them with a grant. Minister, if you can give them 20 minutes they will come here from Western Australia to see you, and that would be money well spent. I ask for your support.

China

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (12.30 pm)—I want to mention a recent article in the Business Spectator written by former foreign minister Alexander Downer. I am sure General MacArthur’s dictum of old soldiers fading away would have been embraced by the member for Curtin, Julie Bishop, when she read this article. It seems to be undiplomatic from someone who is supposed to be busy solving the Cyprus problems as the United Nations Special Envoy, a job the Rudd government supported him in getting, to be critical of the current gov-
ernment’s policy towards China. ‘Fix the China relationship,’ he demands, as if it were a matt-
er of chatting to some chaps at the Adelaide Club. What we need is ‘mature dialogue’, he
says, as though 11 years of mature dialogue between the previous government and the Chi-
nese regime had some magical effect on Chinese behaviour. Things must be ‘managed dis-
creetly’, he says, not mentioning that it was his own party that last year demanded tougher
action against Stern Hu and at the same time accused the current Prime Minister of being too
friendly with Beijing.

The fact is that the terms of the China debate have changed dramatically since Mr Downer
left office two years ago, and it is time he caught up. China’s behaviour has been growing
steadily more aggressive both domestically and internationally. We saw it most dramatically
with China’s sabotage of the Copenhagen climate summit and its gross discourtesy towards
the President of the United States at Copenhagen. China is cracking down harder than ever on
domestic dissidents such as the Tibetan and Uygur minorities. Recently we saw Dr Liu
Xiaobo, the leader of the 300 Chinese academics’ Charter 08, modelled on the great democrat
Vaclav Havel and his attempts at liberation in Europe, sentenced to 11 years in prison for in-
citing subversion of state power. This academic, who offered no violent threat to the Chinese
state, was jailed for 11 years, and Mr Downer thinks we should accept this without comment.

China is getting much tougher in the business area. James McGregor, the former Chairman
of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, writing in Time magazine, said:
I have seldom seen the foreign business community more angry and disillusioned than it is today.
He cited:
… arrogant and insolent Chinese bureaucrats … purposefully inconsistent and nontransparent
enforcement of regulations, rampant intellectual-property theft … blatant market impediments through
rigged product standards and testing, politicized courts and agencies …and selective enforcement of
WTO requirements …
but Mr Downer thinks we should say nothing about this.

Internationally, China has stepped up its campaign to become a leader of the anti-Western
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, with Russia as its junior partner. Every oppressive re-
gime in the world knows that it has a good friend in China, especially if the Chinese want
something in exchange. The military junta in Burma, the genocidal regime in Sudan, the dic-
tatorship in Yemen, the ayatollahs in Tehran who shoot down demonstrators in the streets,
Mugabe’s plunder of Zimbabwe—these are all China’s best friends in the world. In exchange,
the Chinese get cheap Sudanese oil, Iranian oil, platinum from Zimbabwe, naval bases from
Burma. It is sad to see a great people like the Chinese people, who have suffered at the hands
of Western imperialism, being ruled by a regime which is itself becoming a neocolonialist.

How should Australia respond to this new phase in China’s policies? We should respond by
defending our interests and values. Mr Downer disagrees. He said we should accept the trend
towards domestic neoStalinism in China, its arrogant and corrupt conduct in business relations
and its unprincipled international behaviour. Like Julie Bishop, he says we should not have
granted a visa to the Uygur dissident leader Rebiya Kadeer. He says we should not criticise
China’s treatment of domestic dissidents. He says we should not extend our support to the
people of Tibet. He implies we should not pay attention to China’s provocative military tri-
umphalism celebrating the anniversary of the Communist Party in Beijing just a few months
ago, a regime that the great biographer of Mao, Philip Short, notes is responsible for the

MAIN COMMITTEE
I am pleased to say that Australia will not be accepting Mr Downer’s rather patronising advice. The Rudd government has sought to maintain a relationship with China that is both in Australia’s economic and diplomatic interests and consistent with our national values. It is not an easy task. Despite the difficulties posed by China’s increasingly anti-Western attitudes, the Rudd government is doing a much better job than its predecessor. Mr Downer, whose term of office included the scandal of the Australian Wheat Board, is in no position to lecture us. He should stick to his day job in Cyprus and leave Australia’s foreign policy to the government the people elected.

Paterson Electorate: Housing

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (12.35 pm)—I rise today to raise concerns on behalf of the people of Paterson electorate whose rights have been eroded as part of Kevin Rudd’s reckless cash splash. I speak in particular reference to the proposed high-density affordable housing developments in Kenrose, Breckenridge and Short streets in Forster and at Flinders Street, East Maitland, which have attracted hundreds of objections. All are very similar in nature, so I will use 5A Kenrose Street to illustrate my concerns.

Let me paint the picture for you. Imagine your street is low-density residential with mostly elderly residents. Parking is sometimes a problem because of the local playgroup and church, which brings an influx of drivers on Sunday, but other than that your street is quiet and pleasant. Now imagine that you get an unsigned, undated letter in your letterbox informing you that 20 units are to be built next door. Housing NSW intends to build a 20-unit development with just four parking spots, two allocated as disabled, and barely space for ambulance access, no room for clothes lines and no yard space for the pet dog. The council has been bypassed in the decision making, and you have just three weeks to lodge an objection. This three-week period falls in December when you are already busy trying to prepare for holidays and visitors.

There are a number of indications that this is simply wrong. Firstly, residents themselves have identified a number of problems, such as: where will the 40 garbage bins go on collection day, and where will residents park when the four spaces are full? Secondly, council separately approved a development for this site, in accordance with planning controls, consisting of nine units. That is less than half the number of units that Housing NSW intends to inflict on the site. The size and density of this development are not fair on nearby residents and not fair on its potential inhabitants. It does not fit in with the environment. The lack of consultation is extremely worrying.

Obviously this is another example of devious action and mismanagement by the New South Wales state Labor government. However, the blame also rests on Kevin Rudd, who enabled the state by simply handing out taxpayers’ cash and walking away. It is like giving an eight-year-old the keys to the family car and closing your eyes when they get into the driver’s seat; it is dangerous and it is stupid. The stupidity is clear to the everyday resident, as evidenced in the dozens of letters that I have received. For example, Trevor and Julie wrote to me:

Kenrose street is a “No Through” street which means there is only one way into the subdivision and one way out. Kenrose Street is a narrow street and the plan shows that there is very limited parking for the
proposed residents and visitors … With the increase flow of traffic, demand for parking and the extra pressure placed on the entry/exit point to our subdivision, we gravely fear for the safety of young children. With more cars parked in the street we feel that driving in our street could become quite difficult and dangerous. To add to the safety issues is the fact that our streets do no have footpaths and people use the roadway for walking. We are assuming that the proposed development would house at least 50 people. The units proposed appear small in size and offer extremely limited, if any, recreational area for such a large number of possible residents. The proposed residents would be living in close proximity to each other and if senior citizens are living there they may have difficulties negotiating the stairs.

This letter reflects the thoughts and minds of the hundreds of residents who recently attended a meeting with me regarding the Kenrose, Breckenridge and Short Street developments and demonstrates a number of key problems. If these problems are apparent to the untrained resident then they should be apparent to both the state and federal Labor governments, which employ trained planning professionals.

In an article in the *Newcastle Herald* on 22 January, the New South Wales Minister for Housing labelled these constituents as ‘narrow-minded people who struggle with the idea of sharing their neighbourhood’ and then went on to say:

The bad old days of super-blocks, poor design and high density have gone for good and everything we build from now on be they stimulus homes or state built homes, will be carefully designed to blend social housing with private housing and all well apart.

Mr Borger, you are a fool, because you believe your own media releases. You should get out from your plush office and go and talk to these people, because your statement about design and the impact on the community is hypocritical rubbish. Today I call on the Prime Minister to lend his ears to my constituents and demand that the New South Wales government do what is right for the residents affected. We must make sure, as we hand out cash to the New South Wales Labor government, that there is transparency and there is accountability for their actions and what they intend to impose upon the community. This style of development is unsuitable, unacceptable and intolerable in this community.

**Mr Jim Maher AO**

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (12.40 pm)—I rise today to speak about Jim Maher AO, a man who was a true giant of the trade union movement and one of the most influential figures in building the largest union in Australia—the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, known affectionately as ‘the Shoppies’. Jim was born in East Melbourne in 1927, the eldest child of Irish immigrants Michael Patrick and Bridget Mary, and sadly passed away in December, aged 82. He was a cherished member of the union and Labor Party community.

He lived much of his life in Bonbeach, in my electorate. I had a bit to do with Jim in the last years of his life, because he kept up his involvement with the Labor Party well after his retirement from formal positions with the SDA, including serving on the Victorian ALP disputes tribunal.

After attending Sacred Heart Good Samaritans Convent School and then Christian Brothers in Clifton Hill, Jim was so impressive in his job at the Munitions Department that then federal Minister for Munitions, the Hon. Norman Makin, put him on his personal staff at the tender age of 16. This was in 1943. While he was a junior member of the minister’s staff in Melbourne and Canberra, Jim excelled and often attended football games with his boss and Prime Minister John Curtin, who would share intimate knowledge about the war and the strain of
national leadership. To Jim’s credit, even six decades on, he kept John Curtin’s confidence and would not make those discussions public, despite repeated requests from several Curtin biographers.

After the war Jim became a shop assistant and immediately joined the Shop Assistants Union. In 1948 he was elected the union’s delegate to the Victorian Trades Hall Council, and four years later he was the first rank-and-file union member to be elected to the state council of the Shop Assistants Union. Jim turned down a job offer from the union in 1953, but three years later he took up the position as country organiser, a position he held for nearly 13 years before being elected as the assistant state secretary of the Shoppies.

In 1970 Jim took over as national president of the union, and in 1973 he became the secretary of the Victorian branch. Such was his effectiveness and passion, Jim served as state secretary of the SDA for 18 years and was national president for a quarter of a century, finally leaving his post in 1995. He also served as vice-president of the ACTU for 11 years, retiring as senior vice-president in 1991.

Jim achieved many, often groundbreaking advances for the SDA and vulnerable retail workers. As Senator Don Farrell, who is present in the chamber—together with Michael Danby, the member for Melbourne Ports—said in 2008:

Jim Maher has improved the lives of millions of working Australians through better wages and conditions.

To Jim, no achievement was more significant than the national membership agreement the Shoppies struck with major retailers in 1971, which saw retailers actively encourage employees to join the union and automatically deduct union fees from their pay. This led to the SDA’s membership rising from around 57,000 in 1971 to almost 250,000 when Jim retired as national president in 1995, making the Shoppies the strongest union in the country.

Jim was instrumental in mending the rifts left over from the Labor split in 1955 and led the Shoppies back into the fold of the ALP in the mid-eighties, helping make the Labor Party a stronger and more representative political force. At last year’s launch of the SDA’s centenary history, former Prime Minister Bob Hawke described Jim’s contribution to the union movement, both in Victoria and nationally, as ‘profound and enduring’.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Jim’s role in ensuring compulsory superannuation was introduced for retail workers in the late eighties. In 2008, Jim was still a trustee of the giant retail industry super fund REST, which he helped found and which now manages more than $14 billion of members’ funds. In 1988 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for his services to the trade union movement both within Australia and internationally; and, more remarkably, Jim was awarded the Polish Commander’s Cross, then Poland’s highest civilian award, for his efforts in assisting the Polish Solidarity movement.

Jim is survived by his wife Fran and his extended family. He will be greatly missed in the local community, at St Joseph’s in Chelsea, by the union movement and by the Labor Party. He will be particularly missed by the many people he mentored, influenced and left an indelible mark on. A fitting note to end on is Bob Hawke’s glowing tribute made just before Jim’s death:
I say this quite genuinely: there was no unionist I dealt with that I admired more than Jim Maher. We had our differences on political and social issues but there was never any doubt about the total commitment of Jim personally and the dedicated leadership he provided. May he rest in peace.

**Chesson Family**

Mr IRONS (Swan) (12.45 pm)—Recently, I had the unique opportunity of getting involved with the arts through a constituent in my electorate. Unfortunately, when it comes to the arts my brother was first in line and took all of the artistic genes available to the male line of the family, and he kept them for himself. My limited experience with the arts was probably swimming in the pools at the front of the Victorian art gallery as a young bloke during the Moomba Festival. My brother, Edward Irons, was, or is, an artist who became a professional student at Flinders University for many years and then returned to Victoria, where he now lives with his family. I was very proud of his talents and admired his painting skills, in secret, because as a younger brother with a competitive spirit I did not give him an inch or any compliments.

Keith Chesson, from my electorate, offered me the chance to officially open his recent art exhibition and I jumped at it. Keith has lived a wonderful life and I want to take this opportunity to tell parliament about it because his family has also been a valuable contributor to the Western Australian community for a long time. Keith has been many things, including a teacher and a principal, a classical violinist, a published author, a scriptwriter, a playwright, an actor, a company director and, obviously, a painter. Keith has achieved many things. He had exhibitions previously, in 1993 and 1998. As an educator he taught at the following schools: Wirrabirra Primary School, Dunsborough Primary School, Frankland River Primary School, Graylands Demonstration School, Wandering Special Native School, Geraldton Primary School, Walkaway Primary School, Wilson Primary School, Jigalong Special Aboriginal School, Clifton Hills Primary School, Rossmoyne Primary School and Bradleys Primary School. I hope that I have managed to get them all in. His preferred musical instruments are the celtic and bluegrass fiddles.

He has a strong family unit, and that was shown by the large number of family members who attended the opening of his exhibition. He gave me a personal tour of his exhibition. I was very impressed with his work and was amazed at how lifelike his work was. I now want to speak about his family and pay tribute to their rich history and contribution to Western Australia as a family. Keith is a member of the fourth generation of the Chesson family. They first settled in Western Australia during the Murchison gold rush of 1893. James Chesson was the first to arrive, in 1893, where, at Cue, he won a match race with the local Sheffield Handicap champion. Having bet his shirt and everything he owned, Jim purchased a lease with the winnings. The Cue One proved to be a successful investment, and in 1895 Jim sent sufficient funds to John Benjamin Chesson to transport William, Alfred, Albert and Jackie, together with Catherine and a baby girl, May, to the Murchison.

John Benjamin Chesson, the original English patriarch, was a talented violinist who travelled widely to play lead fiddler at country balls and barn dances, which is a role he continued in the Murchison. Bridget Chesson, née Mackay, his Irish wife, stayed at home and minded the many children they produced when he arrived home in between gigs.
Alfred Chesson built the hotels in Cremorne, the Half Way Hotel and Chesson’s Day Dawn Hotel, and used them as a prospecting base. Alf leased a claim close to the Great Fingall Gold Mine, ironically called the Mountain View. The Mountain View proved to be a fantastically rich vein of gold.

Catherine Chesson’s maiden name was Currey. When William the Conqueror came to England the Chessum and Corre families came with him as part of the fleet. Subsequently, the Chessum family located themselves in King’s Lynne and the Corre family located themselves in Belfast. The English version of Chessum is Chesson and the Irish version of Corre is Currey. It is not strange that the Irish and English groups intermarried, because they were of the same stock and character. Catherine Chesson was a tough woman, because she walked behind the wagon that carried the baby, May, from Mullewa to Day Dawn. Catherine bore nine children. Tom, the eldest, was killed in a shooting accident. The youngest, a girl, suffocated on a plum stone aboard a train taking her to Geraldton to have it removed. Given the harsh conditions on the goldfields, sometimes whole families perished, and it is a wonder that so many Chessons—Tom, Jack, Syd, May, Idie, Ethel and Nellie—survived. Alf’s son James Sydney Chesson, Keith’s father, was a lead violinist, champion boxer and cyclist, foreman of the Burley football factory and manufacturer of the Chesson football.

Alma Laura Chesson, nee Gibbon, was a Modern School scholarship winner, which meant that she was one of the 50 brightest students in the state, among the sons and daughters of doctors, lawyers and other professionals. Being the daughter of a barmaid, Alma found it difficult and left to take up work as a housemaid-waitress at Curley’s Boarding House in Wiluna. Being a barmaid in those days was equated with being a prostitute.

One last point of interest relates to two Chesson brothers, Tom and Jim, who opposed each other in the Murchison elections, one as a Labor candidate and one as a conservative candidate. The main point at issue was the Japanese brothel situated in the middle of Cue which was largely patronised by the Day Dawn miners. Tom and James held concurrent meetings at the Cue rotunda and the Murchison Club balcony. Rumour has it that the rallies were congenial, but to believe that you would have to be a politician. *(Time expired)*

**Robertson Electorate: Radiotherapy Unit**

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (12.50 pm)—I rise today to keep members informed of the progress of my campaign to secure a public radiotherapy unit for the people of the Central Coast. The Central Coast has a rapidly growing population and a high proportion of older residents. New South Wales Health estimates that, by 2016, there will be 2,596 cancer patients in the Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service region, an increase of almost 30 per cent on the 2006 levels.

I raised this issue in federal parliament in November 2007, and I have made the strongest possible representations to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon. In that speech I informed members that the lack of public radiotherapy services was an intolerable situation. It is not tolerable, because cancer patients on the Central Coast are suffering inexcusable hardship. Sick and distressed patients are forced to travel either to Newcastle or to North Sydney for treatment, often by train. Others are forced to pay thousands of dollars for treatment at local private clinics. Most distressing of all is that some seriously ill patients with cancer have been forced to give up their life-saving treatment altogether because either they cannot manage the travel or they cannot afford the private clinic.
This is a heartbreaking situation and it is avoidable. The Central Coast must have an adequate public radiotherapy service, and I will be fighting very hard to ensure that they get this service. In February 2009, I presented a petition asking the federal parliament to pursue all means possible to provide this service. The petition was launched on the coast on 5 December 2008 and closed at the end of January. The petition campaign was supported by local health advocate Kathy Smith, who is a leading voice for cancer sufferers on the coast. She and fellow members of the advocacy group Cancer Voices certainly joined this campaign, and it quickly turned into a massive movement. When I presented the petition to the Petitions Committee, it held nearly 18,000 signatures from Central Coast residents who supported the cause. To collect so many signatures in such a short time shows the overwhelming support of local residents for this vital public health service.

It has been a wonderful community campaign and it has galvanised opinion across the region. The lack of a publicly funded radiotherapy unit is a public health shortfall that has gone on for far too long. That is why I will continue to fight for this service, and I certainly hope to see it come about while I am the member for Robertson.

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 12.53 pm
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Perth Airport: Flight Paths
(Question No. 961)

Mr Randall asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 7 September 2009:

In respect of noise concerns about the recent changes to the flight path for international and domestic aircraft to and from Perth Airport—

(1) Was any assessment of the potential noise impact resulting from changed flight paths undertaken by agencies; if so, (a) which agencies, (b) what were the results, and (c) what specific areas/suburbs were to experience increased aircraft noise.

(2) Is it a fact that Air Services Australia has a Noise Enquiry Unit which manages community feedback and logs complaints about aircraft noise; if so, (a) how are complaints registered, (b) how are registered complaints handled, (c) do complainants receive responses from the Unit, (d) how many complaints were received by the Unit specifically relating to the changed flight paths for the (i) period 1 November 2008 to 1 August 2009, and (ii) 12 months preceding 1 November 2008, and (e) what are the names of the areas/suburbs where residents have submitted the greatest number of complaints about the changed flight paths.

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

Airservices Australia has advised that:

(1) Yes.

   (a) Airservices Australia.

   (b) The analysis concluded the proposed changes would not be ‘significant’ under the terms of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

   (c) Further details can be found on the Airservices web site.

(2) Yes.

   (a) - (c) Complaints and enquiries are received by mail, phone, fax, email or via the Internet. Responses vary depending on the nature of the complaint or enquiry and the information requested, if any. Phone enquiries are digitally recorded and staff seek to provide requested information during the call. Where enquiries require investigation and/or cannot be resolved on first contact, the complainant will be contacted when information is available. Airservices regularly provides summaries of complaints to respective airport community consultation committees – information that may identify individual complainants is not provided. Complainants receive responses from the Noise Enquiry Unit if requested – this is made clear at the time a complaint is lodged.

   (d) (i) 564 complaints from 239 complainants.

   (ii) 438 complaints from 226 complainants.

   (e) Complaints have been received from suburbs adjoining the airport.

Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport: Curfew
(Question No. 981)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 8 September 2009:

In respect of the curfew in force at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport—
(1) Why are jet aircraft using airspace over Sydney during the period of the curfew and then landing on Runway 34L between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.

(2) Does section 12 of the Sydney Airport Curfew Act 1995 allow limited departures and arrivals at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, subject to stringent conditions, to provide aircraft noise protection to residents in built-up areas.

(3) What protection exists for the residents of Sydney to avoid significant disturbance from jet aircraft overflights during the curfew period when the period is only applicable for the take-off and landing periods.

(4) Will the Government take action to require Air Services Australia to eliminate all jet overflights in built-up areas of Sydney during the curfew period, if so, when; if not, why not.

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

The Regulations concerning the current curfew arrangements at Sydney Airport were tabled by the Howard Government on 30 April 1996.

Tibet

(Question Nos. 1125 and 1126)

Mr Slipper asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 24 November 2009:

(1) Can he indicate the Government’s position on the execution of two Tibetans—Lobsang Gyaltse and Loyak—on 20 October 2009 in connection with the events in Lhasa on 14 March 2008.

(2) Can the Government detail the representations made by the Australian Embassy in Beijing on behalf of Lobsang Gyaltse and Loyak in 2009.

(3) Can the Government confirm that the sentences of Lobsang Gyaltse and Loyak were reviewed and ratified by the Supreme People’s Court, as required by article 48 of the People’s Republic of China’s Criminal Procedure Law.

(4) What information does the Government have on legal representation provided to these individuals and can he indicate whether the Government is of the opinion that they received a fair trial.

(5) Can he confirm reports that two further executions were carried out on 20 October 2009—a Tibetan woman named Penkyi and an unnamed Tibetan.

(6) Can he confirm that three further Tibetans—Tenzin Phuntsok, Kangtsuk and Penkyi—have been handed suspended death sentences in April 2009 in connection with the events in Lhasa on 14 March 2008; if so, has or will the Government request that these sentences be commuted.

(7) Can he provide information on the status and whereabouts of Tenzin Phuntsok, Kangtsuk and Penkyi; if the Government does not have such information, what steps will it take to obtain it.

(8) Is the Government aware of any further death sentences or suspended death sentences passed in connection with protests in Tibet on or since 14 March 2008.

(9) What steps will the Government take to encourage due legal process for Tibetans charged in connection with protests beginning in March 2008, and to encourage China to refrain from passing the death penalty.

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

(1) The Australian Government is universally opposed to the use of capital punishment. The Government is opposed to all executions that take place throughout the world, including the cases of Lobsang Gyaltse and Loyak.

(2) The Australian Embassy in Beijing made representations to the Chinese Government in April 2009 about the sentence handed down on Lobsang Gyaltse and Loyak, expressing Australia’s opposition to the death penalty and urging China to commute the sentences.
(3) The Government cannot confirm that the sentences of Lobsang Gyaltsen and Loyak were reviewed and ratified by the Supreme People’s Court.

(4) The Government has no information on legal representation and is not in a position to comment on the trial.

(5) The Government cannot confirm reports that two further executions were carried out on 20 October 2009.

(6) The Government cannot confirm that these three individuals have been handed suspended death sentences in April 2009 in connection with the events in Lhasa on 14 March 2008.

(7) No. The Government will make enquiries through diplomatic channels.

(8) No.

(9) As part of the bilateral Human Rights Dialogue, the Government urges China to ensure the human rights of all Chinese citizens are fully guaranteed and that due legal process is guaranteed in criminal proceedings. We also encourage the Chinese Government to establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty as a key step towards the complete abolition of capital punishment. We will continue these efforts.

**Active After-School Communities Program**

(Question No. 1141)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Sport, in writing, on 26 November 2009:

In respect of the Active After-school Communities program:

(1) What is the breakdown of sports and activities on offer

(2) What are the names of the (a) schools, and (b) out of school care services sites, on the pending list, and for how long have they been on the list.

Ms Kate Ellis—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The sports and activities on offer within the Active After-school Communities program are at Attachment A.

(2) The names of the schools and out of school care services on the pending list are at Attachment B. The pending list for the Active After-school Communities program is a current ‘point in time’ measure. Whilst the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is not able to accurately provide historical information concerning pending list information, at a point of time in previous financial years, previous ASC ‘point in time’ records have shown a pending list of between 500 and 600 schools and out of school hours care providers in 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09. This information was not subdivided into schools and out of school hours care providers.

**Attachment A:** Listing of sports and activities on offer within the Active After-school Communities program is available from the House of Representatives Table Office.

**Attachment B:** Listing of schools and out of school care services is available from the House of Representatives Table Office.

**National Sporting Organisations**

(Question No. 1142)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Sport, in writing, on 26 November 2009:

In respect of the Australian Sports Commission (the Commission) and Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) funding of National Sporting Organisations (NSO) and National Sporting Organisations with a Disability (NSOD): what are the indicative funding levels for each NSO and NSOD in:

(a) 2010-11,
(b) 2011-12, and  
(c) 2012-13, for (i) the AIS, (ii) High Performance, (iii) Sport Development, (iv) other targeted programs, and what is the total sum of funding.  

**Ms Kate Ellis**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:  

To date, the following 18 National Sporting Organisations (NSO) have been provided with indicative funding levels for the 2009-2013 quadrennium.  

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(1) APC allocation includes additional Federal Government support of $22.8 over 5 years that commenced in 2007-08. The allocation has a mix of baseline and specific measure funding, anticipated funding levels will be at least $8.95m in 2010-11, $5.50m in 2011-12 and $3.50m in 2012-13. APC previous base figure is $3.50m and they are scheduled to return to that funding level when the additional funding commitments cease.
Independent Review of Sport
(Question No. 1143)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Sport, in writing, on 26 November 2009:
On what date did (a) she, and (b) her department, first receive the report on the Government’s Independent Review of Sport.

Ms Kate Ellis—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(a) The department received an electronic version of the Report on 15 October 2009 and forwarded that to the Minister’s office after business hours on the same day.
(b) The Minister received a copy of the Report on Friday, 16 October 2009.