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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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<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
Rudd Ministry

Prime Minister
Hon. Kevin Rudd MP

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion
Hon. Julia Gillard MP

Treasurer
Hon. Wayne Swan MP

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Senator Hon. Chris Evans

Minister for Defence and Vice President of the Executive Council
Senator Hon. John Faulkner

Minister for Trade
Hon. Simon Crean MP

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the House
Hon. Stephen Smith MP

Minister for Health and Ageing
Hon. Nicola Roxon MP

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Hon. Jenny Macklin MP

Minister for Finance and Deregulation
Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House
Hon. Anthony Albanese MP

Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy

Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Senator Hon. Kim Carr

Minister for Climate Change and Water
Senator Hon. Penny Wong

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP

Attorney-General
Hon. Robert McClelland MP

Cabinet Secretary, Special Minister of State and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Tony Burke MP

Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism
Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP

Minister for Human Services and Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law
Hon. Chris Bowen MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
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<td>Hon. Alan Griffin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Justine Elliot MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water</td>
<td>Hon. Maxine McKew MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction</td>
<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>Hon. Bob McMullan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Byrne MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secretary for Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services</td>
<td>Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Employment</td>
<td>Hon. Jason Clare MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Health</td>
<td>Hon. Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry</td>
<td>Hon. Richard Marles MP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Tony Abbott MP

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

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

Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Senator Hon. Nick Minchin

Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz

Shadow Treasurer
Hon. Joe Hockey MP

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

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Attorney-General
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC

Shadow Minister for Defence
Senator Hon. David Johnston

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Hon. Peter Dutton MP

Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services
Hon. Kevin Andrews MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage
Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion

Shadow Minister for Finance and Debt Reduction and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Senator Barnaby Joyce

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

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Deregulation, Competition Policy and Sustainable Cities
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
Hon. Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Mr Scott Morrison MP

Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Chairman of the Coalition Policy Development Committee
Hon. Andrew Robb AO MP

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

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 COAG and Modernising the Federation
Senator Marise Payne

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 Ageing
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells

Shadow Minister for Seniors
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP

Shadow Special Minister of State and Scrutiny of Government Waste
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Population Policy
Senator Cory Bernardi

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport
Mr Don Randall MP

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
Mrs Jo Gash MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education and School Curriculum Standards
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray Darling Basin and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action
Senator Simon Birmingham

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Mr Stuart Robert MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services, Health and Wellbeing
Dr Andrew Southcott MP

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Housing and Human Services and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship
Senator Gary Humphries

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 12 pm and read prayers.

PRIVILEGE

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (12.01 pm)—Mr Speaker, I rise to advise the House of a possible breach of privilege. Last Thursday, 4 February, the Public Works Committee held a private meeting with officials of the Department of Defence to discuss the single living environment and accommodation precinct project phase 2, known as ‘Single LEAP 2’. At the meeting, the Defence officials emphasised that they would be discussing commercially sensitive information and requested the committee’s agreement that the briefing be treated as confidential. The committee agreed that the briefing would be confidential.

An article in the Townsville Bulletin of 5 February contained information provided to the committee at the briefing. The journalist identified his source as the honourable member for Herbert, a member of the committee. At a meeting called today, the committee resolved that it would investigate the newspaper article as representing an unauthorised disclosure of committee proceedings. The committee is particularly concerned that the unauthorised disclosures of information given in confidence may interfere with the committee’s ability to hold frank discussions in future with officials about public works. I wish to advise the House that the committee will conduct its own inquiries and report its findings to both chambers.

The SPEAKER (12.02 pm)—I thank the member for Chifley, the Chief Government Whip, for his advice of the committee’s actions. It is appropriate to indicate that that is the way in which these matters are handled, with the committee looking at the allegation in the first place. The House will await the report of the committee.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Private Members’ Motions

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41(h), and the recommendations of the whips adopted by the House on 3 February 2010, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for Mayo, Fremantle and Kalgoorlie. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT (NEW ZEALAND OVERSEAS TRAINED DOCTORS) BILL 2009
HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT BILL 2009
SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

STATUTE LAW REVISION BILL 2009

First Reading

Bill received from the Senate and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS AMENDMENT (RE-REGISTRATION OF PROVIDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered at the next sitting.
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)
(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 4 February, on mo-
tion by Mr Combet:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (12.07 pm)—by
leave—I move:

That standing order 76 be suspended for the
duration of the first speech by the Member for
Higgins on the second reading debate on this bill.

Question agreed to.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (12.07 pm)—I
wish to speak on the misnamed Carbon Pol-
lution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and re-
lated bills. Carbon in its natural state is
graphite. Is that what the government is at-
ttempting to ban? If you cannot get the basic
terminology right even in the title of the bill,
how are we supposed to believe that you are
across all of the other issues relating to this?

Today I want to talk about that old adage
that we all know to be true: whenever a La-
bor politician has a good idea, Australians
have less money. Be it interest rates or infla-
tion deficits or taxing anything and every-
thing, Australians know a Labor government
means that they will have less money in their
pockets. The ETS legislation is a continua-
tion of what all Australians know as the third
certainty in life: that is, death, taxes and La-
bor pinching money out of your back pocket.

This ETS will rob the average Austra-
lian—or, just for the Prime Minister and his
focus group, ‘working families’—out of their
hard-earned money. The ETS is a highly
complex engine for converting the useful,
deployed wealth of our society into the least
useful, most wasteful and insoluble sub-
stance on earth—pure profit for rich indi-
viduals. As we have seen overseas, the cap-
and-trade systems create a speculative bub-
ble which the finance industry loads up to
suck vast sums of money out of middle- and
lower-class wage-earners—those working
families.

With the aid of an intellectually corrupt
edifice, the ETS, the Labor Party has created
a legal exchange for the bankers and financi-
ers to strip money out of the working class.
This money will be put straight into the re-
tirement accounts of hedge fund managers
and speculative money spinners. Prime Min-
ister—or, should that be, cap-and-trade of the
notorious pirate ship, Labor’s ETS tax—your
government is trading not in carbon but in
misery. Your pirates want to pillage the wal-
lets of working Australians.

The process is that banks and investment
houses position themselves in the middle of a
growing speculative carbon bubble and sell
to their clients investments that they know
are junk. A few traders, fund managers and
savvy financiers then make millions inflating
the price of that commodity. Essentially,
these financiers are peddling an element on
the periodic table that is free to anybody any
time. In the end game, the financial bubble
caused by the carbon bubble goes bust, leav-
ing millions of ordinary citizens broke and
starving. The government will then ride to
the rescue of us all by lending us back our
own money at interest. Thank you, cap-and-
trade.

Banks and financial institutions world-
wide are preparing to do it all again—
creating what may be the biggest and most
audacious bubble yet. We have Mr Rudd and
Ms Wong to thank for all that goes bust,
though. The new carbon credit market is a
virtual repeat of the commodities market
casino that has been kind to Goldman, except
it has one delicious new wrinkle: if the plan
goes forward as expected, the rise in prices
will be government mandated. Goldman will
not even have to rig the game; it will be
rigged in advance.

Here is how it works. If the bill passes,
there will be limits for coal plants, utilities,
natural gas distributors and numerous other
industries on the amount of carbon emis-
sions—also known as greenhouse gases—
they can produce per year. If the companies
go over their allocation, they will be able to
buy allocations or credits from other compa-

dies that have managed to produce fewer

emissions. President Obama conservatively
estimates that about $646 billion worth of
carbon credits will be auctioned in the first
seven years. One of his top economic aides
speculates that the real number might be
twice or even three times that amount.

The feature of this plan that has a special
appeal to speculators is that the cap on car-
bon will be continually lowered by the gov-
ernment, which means that carbon credits
will become more and more scarce with each
passing year. That means that the volume of
this brand new commodities market, where
the main commodity to be traded is guaran-
teed to rise in price over time, will be up-
wards of a trillion dollars annually. For com-
parisons sake, the annual combined revenues
of all electricity suppliers in the US total
$320 billion. The plan is for money-spinners
to get in on the ground floor of paradigm-
shifting legislation, make sure that they are
the profit-making slice of that paradigm and
make sure that the slice is a big slice.

The economic impacts of an emissions
trading scheme for an Australian workers are
mixed—both good and bad, depending on
which end of the economic scale you sit. For
low-income earners, the cost-of-living in-
creases will push many elderly and poor into
abject poverty. A crazy situation when you
consider that my state, Western Australia, is
at the beginning of another resources boom,
which has already put upward pressure on
everyday prices. No possible compensation
the government is offering will fully cover
the inflated cost-of-living increases. Many
pensioners, seniors and veterans are already
struggling with everyday bills and necessi-
ties. An ETS will put everyday items out of
reach.

There are Australians who will benefit
from an ETS, though—people who have
seen it all before, a group of individuals
whose job it is to turn ordinary commodities
into tradeable profit. I am of course referring to bankers, fund managers and traders, who are circling the carbon market ready to turn the scheme into their next casino venture. What do I mean by casino venture? I am talking about financial institutions betting their houses on the market, which will wildly inflate the price of carbon credits. In this way those banks and financiers who foresaw this boondoggle and got it off the ground floor will all retire as wealthy people. They have a vested interest in seeing this legislation being enacted and have much to lose if it does not. Labor has put us in an all or nothing economic situation.

Our Prime Minister railed against the excesses of our market systems as the GFC hit fever pitch. It was, after all, market forces that inflated, caused and created the great bust of 1998. Yet on the greatest moral issue of our time where does he turn to solve these issues? The market. This new commodity market will see prices swing wildly up and down. Ultimately, a speculative bubble will be created, paper fortunes won and lost, and then it will all go horribly wrong when people realise the credits they are trading in are in fact worthless. The people who will be hit hardest are the mum and dad investors who will get caught up in the hysteria caused by the ETS—a huge, highly complex engine for converting the useful, deployed wealth of society into pure profit for rich individuals.

The Prime Minister has obviously not been following the crisis in climate science: the junk science, the corruption, the collusion and the endemic lack of peer review. The member for Page talks about consensus. Think about consensus on religion here for a second. The consensus of trained experts is that a Christian god, in consensus terms, particularly in Australia, exists. So why do you reject that consensus? The fact is there is no such thing as consensus science. If there is a consensus, it is not science and if it is science it is not consensus—period. I will quote the late, great Michael Crichton on some of the history of consensus science and the damage that it can do:

In past centuries, the greatest killer of women was fever following childbirth. One woman in six died of this fever.

In 1795, Alexander Gordon of Aberdeen suggested that the fevers were infectious processes, and he was able to cure them. The consensus said no.

In 1843, Oliver Wendell Holmes claimed puerperal fever was contagious, and presented compelling evidence. The consensus said no.

In 1849, Semmelweiss demonstrated that sanitary techniques virtually eliminated puerperal fever in hospitals under his management. The consensus said he was a Jew, ignored him, and dismissed him from his post. There was in fact no agreement on puerperal fever until the start of the twentieth century. Thus the consensus took one hundred and twenty five years to arrive at the right conclusion despite the efforts of the prominent ‘skeptics’ around the world, skeptics who were demeaned and ignored. And despite the constant ongoing deaths of women.

There is no shortage of other examples. In the 1920s in America, tens of thousands of people, mostly poor, were dying of a disease called pellagra. The consensus of scientists said it was infectious, and what was necessary was to find the ‘pellagra germ.’ The US government asked a brilliant young investigator, Dr. Joseph Goldberger, to find the cause. Goldberger concluded that diet was the crucial factor. The consensus remained wedded to the germ theory.

Goldberger demonstrated that he could induce the disease through diet. He demonstrated that the disease was not infectious by injecting the blood of a pellagra patient into himself, and his assistant. They and other volunteers swabbed their
noses with swabs from pellagra patients, and swallowed capsules containing scabs from pel-
lagra rashes in what were called 'Goldberger's filth parties.' Nobody contracted pellagra.

The consensus continued to disagree with him. There was, in addition, a social factor—southern States disliked the idea of poor diet as the cause, because it meant that social reform was required. They continued to deny it until the 1920s. Result—despite a twentieth century epidemic, the consensus took years to see the light.

Probably every schoolchild notices that South America and Africa seem to fit together rather snugly, and Alfred Wegener proposed, in 1912, that the continents had in fact drifted apart. The consensus sneered at continental drift for fifty years. The theory was most vigorously denied by the great names of geology—until 1961, when it began to seem as if the sea floors were spreading. The result: it took the consensus fifty years to acknowledge what any schoolchild sees.

In the Australian context the views of our Nobel Prize winners, Warren and Marshall, ran counter to the consensus view on ulcers and, in fact, Barry Marshall induced ulcers within himself to demonstrate the cause. Once again, the consensus rejected that and they are now Nobel Prize winners. On 3 December Australia’s Chief Scientist, Penny Sackett, was warning that climate oblivion was only a few years away:

I recall Professor Sackett giving evidence to the science committee and that she was not aware of the fact that the relationship between temperature and carbon dioxide is logarithmic. It is a relationship that goes back over 100 years and is represented in all the IPCC reports. She has the belief, but this fundamental relationship eluded her at the time.

I have heard a lot of argument about precautionary principle. The government has used that argument a lot. Let us turn it around. The government wants to impose a great big new tax on the Australian people. Consider this: what if it is wrong? What if the vaunted consensus position changes? After all, if you had been making an argument 40 years ago for controlling the climate, you would have been looking at a scheme to stop the coming ice age, given that the scientific consensus at the time was that we were headed towards another ice age.

Consider this: the government has proposed a great big new tax that is designed for one purpose and one purpose only—that is, to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Consensus changes and the Australian people will have to pay this tax forever. The beauty of our scheme is that it is flexible. If the consensus changes, the policy can be changed. Our policy has distinct environmental advantages, including improving crop yields, getting more efficient underground transmission.
infrastructure and improving visual pollution.

We hear a lot of discussion about how the world agrees that the ETS is a wonderful scheme. Think about this: the ETS has not been particularly effective in Europe. It has not been particularly effective at reducing CO2 emissions and certainly it has not been a very stable commodity to trade. Insanity is to keep doing the same thing and hoping for a different result. Even Britney Spears, of all people, sings:

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.

The government’s ETS tax has no mechanisms to actually reduce CO2 emissions. It is just a tax, and then they hope that the market will drive solutions. The government is corrupt enough in their view of this thing that they will not even consider the one method that really can bring down CO2 emissions—that is, nuclear power. Labor’s criticism of our scheme is based on soil carbons not being counted in international agreements. Who cares? Does the environment know if a molecule of CO2 is removed from the atmosphere using soil sequestration or tree sequestration? Clearly, the environment does not give a damn where the carbon dioxide is sucked into. It just demonstrates how badly constructed international agreements are on this, as evidenced by Copenhagen.

Kerry O’Brien, Tony Jones and David Koch criticise from the safety of not allowing counterargument on their programs. I have challenged both Koch and Jones to have me on to discuss the science—funnily enough, they lack the guts to interview me on it. The members for Leichhardt and Lowe have suggested that members on this side who might agree with an ETS—and there are precious few of them, I might add—should cross the floor. How about letting some of the sceptics on the other side of the House cross the floor? I know of at least four cabinet ministers who are sceptics, but they do not have the guts to say so in public, never mind crossing the floor.

On 2 February, Minister Combet said:

What we have from the other side here is political opportunism, a recognition on the basis of their lack of acceptance of the science—their lack of respect for internationally peer reviewed science in the IPCC fourth assessment report.

We have seen numerous problems with the IPCC fourth assessment report. We have seen numerous instances where propaganda articles from the WWF and Greenpeace are taken at face value and simply accepted as if they were peer reviewed science. On the other hand, there is the issue around Phil Jones, one of the lead authors with the IPCC and head of the University of East Anglia’s Climate Research Unit, when he talked about changing the definition of what constitutes peer review. (Time expired)

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (12.27 pm)—That was a performance by the previous member. He talked about conspiracy theories, pirates, bankers as devils and money-spinners all coming out of this legislation, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related bills. I find it unbelievable and I think most of Australia would as well, as they have with the Liberal Party’s policy on this, which is really a policy of convenience: ‘We need a policy, so we’ll have a policy.’ They have not dealt with the real issues that the government are endeavouring to do deal with in these bills. There has been much discussion on these bills already and it seems almost impossible to come up with more reasons as to why this legislation needs to be passed. I look at it this way: I have lived in this country all my life and I have watched the seasons come and go. I have seen changes in the elements over the last 50 years or so. I guess it has been about 50 years since I started taking notice of climate and changes in the
weather. Growing up in the country, of course, it was always something that was talked about and looked at, and one noted what was happening.

I have also noted that climate conditions have become more unsettled in the latter part of my time on earth. I do not know enough about all that science to say that global warming is actually occurring, but I do feel that the climate is changing on an irregular basis and there are many reasons for it to do so. There are some natural reasons for climate change, such as volcanic activity, changes in vegetation, bushfires and their aftermath, tidal patterns, river paths, the phases of the moon, wet seasons, dry seasons and a whole host of natural changes due to the cycles of weather, which influence what is going on at ground level.

To this you add the activities of man and the animals we share the earth with. Man has been able to influence and change some of the natural influences of climate through being able to harness some of our natural resources to make living in our world easier. We do like electricity to help us cook and heat and to make life more comfortable. We like having wood from our forests to build our houses, to make our furniture and to enjoy the nature of it. We enjoy eating fresh vegetables, fruit, grain, meat and fish and processing them—and, of course, we like our wine and the good old amber fluid. We also have the tendency to fight each other. In order to have these basics of life, to be able to provide everyone with these commodities and to have a surplus for trade, we have manipulated their production.

If you have, as most people do, a basic understanding of chemistry, then you understand that when you add elements to the atmosphere there will be changes, some of them good and some of them not altogether desirable. With any sort of mass production there is a waste stream—emissions, if you like. That waste stream also has to be dealt with, whether by recycling it, by reusing it in some way or by disposing of it safely. We do those things a lot better than we used to, when we started mass production. Whatever we do, and however we do it, there is an element of cost. There will always be an element of cost. If, therefore, we are trying to minimise man’s effect on the earth, then there is an expense attached to it. We have been aware of that for some time.

There is the cost of dealing with waste. When people live together in high-density environments, the land cannot deal with the waste naturally. We have to intervene—to take it away, to pump it out or do something else to deal with it. This is the same with whatever product or activity we are coping with, whether it be the waste from a steel mill or the waste from a chicken coop. Hopefully you would put the chicken poop back into the ground to make it better—we have learnt to take some of the waste from our production and turn that into a plus for us as well. It all has a cost attached to it in some way.

Science has helped in many ways to deal with waste, whether it be by recycling it, reusing it, rendering it inert or carefully destroying it—but, whatever you do, or how careful you are, there is always a bit left over. I expect it is a bit like when we take something apart and put it back together—there is always something left sitting on the kitchen table or on the workbench that does not seem to belong anywhere. There is always something, and sometimes these things tend to add up.

So I say to Mr Abbott: it does not matter how much you bluster and carry on about a great big tax; I am afraid you are already paying for it, and have been paying for it for centuries. What the government is trying to
do, without the help of the opposition, is to make waste a tradeable commodity so that it makes sense economically to do something about it. There is nothing new in paying for emissions. It has just become a little more urgent that we all help to pay—and by ‘all’ I mean on a global scale. It therefore makes economic sense to start setting some boundaries domestically, so that we can keep up with change.

This government is also keen to ensure that some of the less economically fortunate in our community do not suffer unduly from change. That is why we are proposing to help relieve them from taking on a greater burden in their day-to-day lives by allowing some household assistance as the change occurs. It seems likely that we will need to do more to alleviate the problems of our waste streams, but what is less certain is by what quantity and how much that will cost. So there is a need for some risk management—a bit of insurance, if you like.

In an article entitled ‘Climate change: hedging your climate-change bets’, appearing in Science in October 2005, Richard A Kerr says that:

"... uncertainty can justify an alternative to cost-benefit analysis called risk management, an approach people take when they buy insurance. ‘Uncertainty is the reason you buy insurance,” says Yohe. Insurance does nothing to reduce the chances that your house will catch fire, he notes, but “it decreases the consequences should the bad event occur. People are willing to pay premiums for insurance because that spreads the risk.”

Under risk management, decision-makers would consider the range of possible outcomes and then try to avoid the worst by, for example, levying a tax on the carbon in fossil fuels that becomes the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. The tax would reduce the urgency of making more sweeping decisions. At the same time, it would keep in play more ambitious goals such as holding greenhouse gases to even lower levels. All the while, scientists would be learning more about the risks of global warming.

So insurance companies are already thinking about how to deal with risks of climate change. I read another article entitled, ‘An answer to climate change: weather hedging for everybody’, which talked about a weather insurance exchange project. It does not exist at the moment but, given the right ambience, it might be a good model to help farmers mitigate the risks of experiencing a drought. Hedging is a way of spreading the risk, so I guess that these bills are starting to deal with the risks presented by any change in the environment—whether the science agrees or does not agree on what is actually happening.

I have just finished an inquiry into how farmers are dealing with climate change. Many farmers have already started to change farm practices and to come up with new ideas to deal with the changing weather patterns. We need to be able to give them tools and certainty so that their risk mitigation practices can be put into place. The emissions of which I have been speaking are of course known as ‘greenhouse gases’. Many chemical compounds found in the earth’s atmosphere act as greenhouse gases. These gases allow sunlight to enter the atmosphere freely. When sunlight strikes the earth’s surface, some of it is re-radiated back towards space as infrared radiation, or heat. Greenhouse gases absorb this infrared radiation and trap its heat in the atmosphere. Many gases exhibit these greenhouse properties. Some occur naturally, some are produced by human activities, and some are exclusively human made. If it were not for naturally occurring greenhouse gases, the earth would be too cold to support life as we know it. Without the greenhouse effect, the average temperature on earth would be about minus two degrees Fahrenheit rather than 57 degrees Fahrenheit, which we currently experience.
Sometimes you can have too much of a good thing, and allowing too much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere can overload the sink, the oceans, so it collects in the atmosphere, causing heat to be retained. It is these excess greenhouse gases that need to be reduced so that their potential effects can be minimised. Now for a little science, thanks to the BBC’s weather program, which explains the cycle very simply—if one can get this debate into simplicity. Carbon dioxide is probably the most important of the greenhouse gases, as it accounts for the largest proportion of the trace gases, and it is currently responsible for 60 per cent of the enhanced greenhouse effect.

Most of the carbon dioxide was removed from the atmosphere as early organisms evolved photosynthesis. This locked away carbon dioxide as carbonate minerals, oil shale, coal and petroleum in the earth’s crust when the organisms died. This left 0.05 per cent in the atmosphere today. Atmospheric carbon dioxide comes from a number of natural sources, mainly the decay of plants, volcanic eruptions and as a waste product of animal respiration. It is removed from the atmosphere by photosynthesis in plants—that is, absorption through the leaves of plants—and by dissolving in water, especially on the surface of our oceans. Carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for approximately 100 years.

The amount of carbon dioxide taken out of the atmosphere by plants is almost perfectly balanced with the amount put back into the atmosphere by respiration and decay. Small changes as a result of human activity can have a great impact on this delicate balance. Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide stored millions of years ago. We use fossil fuels—including petrol, diesel and kerosene—to heat homes and businesses and to power factories. The use of wood and wood products releases the carbon stored in trees and also results in less carbon dioxide being removed from the atmosphere, hence the need to replant more trees. The majority of the carbon is not lost, though, as it is stored in whatever we make the wood into, such as houses, furniture, paper and all the other wood products we use.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased more in the Northern Hemisphere, where more fossil fuel burning occurs. Since the Industrial Revolution the concentration globally has increased by about 40 per cent. It is this equation that needs to be balanced.

In order to tackle climate change, we must consider two fundamental elements: limiting the carbon pollution that has an influence on climate and putting a cost or price on that carbon pollution. By combining these two means, we can start to deal with climate change and we can also open the door to investment in low-carbon technology and allow carbon trading to help pay for change.

The purpose of these bills is to give us all some certainty on what we can do, how we can do it and what it will cost. Even if the Leader of the Opposition thinks the whole business of climate change is crap, he has missed the point of these bills and in the process is slugging the taxpayer instead of those putting out most of the emissions. His scheme just does not work and, as far as I can see, it is unfunded as there is no means by which he can collect funds from the emitters to help alleviate pain and drive change which is what we have to do. In fact, he seems to be creating a great big tax, not on himself but on his children and on his grandchildren. I think he should get off his despot horse and start looking at reality.

These bills are complex, but they are an insurance for our future and an incentive for our children and our children’s children to act now. Spending $10 a week now instead
of $100 in 30 years is something I think we should be doing. We should not push this aside as something that we cannot deal with. We must deal with it; this government is dealing with it. It has these bills back in the parliament and hopefully, maybe in some miracle way, we can resolve this matter through the Australian parliament and achieve what I believe our nation needs to achieve—that is, to pass these bills. I support these bills.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (12.46 pm)—I rise to speak on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related legislation. All of us here are accountable not just to our constituents but also to the generations that will come after them and after us. It is our job as members of parliament to legislate with an eye to the long-term future, to look over the horizon beyond the next election and ensure that, as far as we can, what we do today will make Australia a better place, a safer place for future generations to live in. Climate change is the ultimate long-term problem. We have to make decisions today, bear costs today so that adverse consequences are avoided, dangerous consequences are avoided many decades into the future. It is always easy to argue we should do nothing, or little or postpone action. But we are already experiencing the symptoms of climate change, especially here in Australia with a hotter and drier climate in the southern part of our nation. The rush to construct desalination plants is just one expensive testament to that.

Climate change is a global problem. The planet is warming because of the growing level of greenhouse gas emissions from human activity. If this trend continues then truly catastrophic consequences will ensue, from rising sea levels to reduced water availability to more heatwaves and fires. In December, just a few weeks ago, we had confirmation from three leading scientific organisations—the UK Met Office and, in the United States, NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—that the past decade, the years from 2000 to 2009, was the hottest since record-keeping began, even hotter than the decade before which was the second-hottest decade on record and the decade before that which was the third hottest on record.

Climate change policy has to recognise these real risks, these real threats to the safety of our planet. It is an exercise in risk management and no reasonable person could regard the risk as being so low that no action was warranted. That has been the view of political leaders for many years from both sides of politics, none more eloquently than Margaret Thatcher herself. Prudence demands that we act to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and do so in a way that is consistent with and promotes global action to do the same. Right now both sides of politics are agreed that Australia should, regardless of whether any international agreement is reached, reduce our emissions by 2020 so that they equal a five per cent cut from 2000 levels. This is a 21 per cent cut from the 2020 business-as-usual levels. Both sides of politics agree that, depending on the nature of the international agreement reached, greater cuts of 15 or 25 per cent should be made.

It is not enough to say that you support these cuts, you must also deliver a strong, credible policy framework that will deliver them. In line with the Copenhagen Accord, the nations of the world are making commitments to reduce their emissions and those commitments will form the basis of the negotiations that will continue at Mexico City this year. Australia should be taking action now in advance of and in order to promote a global agreement. While our emissions are only a small share of the global total, we are in per capita terms one of the highest emi-
ters. How can we credibly expect China, with per capita emissions less than a quarter of ours, or India, with per capita emissions less than one-tenth of ours, to take our call for global action seriously if we, a wealthy developed nation, are not prepared to act ourselves?

This transition from a high-emission economy to a low-emission one cannot be achieved without major changes to the way we generate and use energy and in the way we manage our landscape. This requires substantial new investment especially in electricity generation, which has increased by 45 per cent since 1990 and represents now a little more than half of our total emissions. Decisions to build new power stations and replace old ones will involve tens of billions of dollars over the next few decades and a critical element in making those decisions is being able to form a view about the direction of carbon pricing. Given that the cheapest fuels are generally the dirtiest, in the absence of a clear carbon price signal new capacity is likely to be coal rather than gas or rather than renewables.

This need for leadership and direction from government on the pricing of carbon, on the level of emissions, was one that was apparent to the previous government. That is why in 2006 Prime Minister John Howard established the emissions trading task group headed by Dr Peter Shergold, the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The task group also included leaders from the industries most directly affected, such as transport, aluminium, mining, agriculture and power generation. In 2007 the Howard government adopted the Shergold task group’s recommendation to establish an emissions trading scheme in advance of and in order to promote a global agreement, and we began to introduce the necessary legislation. As the Shergold report observed:

An Australian emissions trading scheme, with a carbon price set by the market, would improve business investment certainty. This is particularly the case for projects with a high degree of carbon risk. There is growing evidence that investments are being deferred due to uncertainty about the future cost of addressing climate change. Without a clear signal on future carbon costs, these investments will not be optimised. There is a risk that a higher carbon profile will be locked in for the life of the capital stock.

Plainly stated, in the absence of a clear carbon price signal, either no new investments will be made or investments will be made in new carbon intensive infrastructure because they are more profitable in a world where there is no price on carbon emissions.

An ETS works by setting a limit, or a cap, on the amount of carbon dioxide and its equivalents which the total covered industry sectors can emit. These industries are required to acquire permits to emit CO2 within that overall cap. I note that the government does not set the price of carbon; it sets the cap on emissions and the rules of the scheme, and then it is up to the market, the laws of supply and demand, to set the price. It does not give quotas to particular industries or firms. The cap is across the economy and is set at a level of emissions which will over the relevant period enable us to meet our target. These permits can be purchased from the government or from other permit holders, or can be offset by purchasing a carbon credit from someone, like a farmer, who is taking action which reduces atmospheric carbon.

Only a small number of businesses—around one thousand big emitters—will have to buy permits. The direct impact of the ETS, therefore, for almost all Australians is via increased energy prices. The New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, IPART, estimates that in 2013, for example, the cost of the CPRS will comprise
15 per cent of a typical electricity bill in New South Wales. It is estimated by the Treasury overall that the CPRS will add about 19 per cent to electricity prices.

The scheme will raise a substantial amount of revenue over the period to 2020, but it is not designed—nor should it be—to raise additional net revenue for the government, as taxes do, since the funds raised by the sale of permits will be returned to compensate lower income households and assist businesses, especially those which are emissions intensive and trade exposed and cannot readily pass on the increase in energy costs. The white paper estimates the CPRS will result in a one-off increase in the CPI of 1.1 per cent, compared to the 2.8 per cent one-off increase in the CPI caused by the introduction of the GST. Most households will be compensated for this increase in costs either in whole or in part. I should note that the largest component of increases in electricity prices in New South Wales, for example, over the next five years is in fact additional network charges to recognise the increased investment in the security and reliability of electricity infrastructure. Those increases, unlike the CPRS element, are not the subject of any compensation.

But, given we have an apparent bipartisan agreement that emissions should be reduced by five per cent of 2000 levels by 2020, is an emissions trading scheme, this CPRS, at a general level the best policy to achieve the desired outcome? Believing as I do, as a Liberal, that market forces deliver the lowest cost and most effective solution to economic challenges, the answer must be yes. Because more emissions-intensive industries and generators need to buy more permits than less intensive ones, lower emissions activities, whether they are cleaner fuels or energy efficient buildings, are made more competitive. A brown coal fired power station, for example, pumps out four times as much CO2 as an efficient gas fired one. Gas is expensive and clean; brown coal is cheap and dirty. If there is no cost charged for emitting carbon, there is simply no incentive to move to the cleaner fuel.

Until 1 December last year, there was a bipartisan commitment in Australia that this carbon price, this exercise in reducing emissions, should be imposed by means of a market based mechanism—this emissions trading scheme. At their core, therefore, these bills are as much the work of John Howard as of Kevin Rudd. The policy I am supporting here today as an opposition backbencher is the same policy I supported as John Howard’s environment minister. And why did we in the Howard government believe an emissions trading scheme was the best approach? It was because we as Liberals believed in the superior efficiency of the free market to set a price on carbon. As the Shergold report observes:

Market-based approaches have the potential to deliver least-cost abatement by providing incentives for firms to reduce emissions where this is cheapest, while allowing the continuation of emissions where they are most costly to reduce.

The Rudd government’s approach has broadly embodied the same principles, although there were problems and flaws with its initial design. But extensive modifications were made in May 2009 and again in November 2009, when changes were agreed between the government and the opposition following the negotiations between Senator Wong and the member for Groom and me. These changes have made it into a scheme that appropriately balances environmental effectiveness and economic responsibility. In fact, the proposed scheme very closely resembles the outline of the Howard government’s original 2007 proposal, in both its incidence and its timing. As we have seen in recent days, alternatives such as direct regulation or subsidies will be far more costly to
the economy, no matter how hard their designers seek to argue the contrary. I quote again from the Shergold report on this topic: An alternative to regulating emissions abatement is subsidising abatement activities from government budgets. For example, government could target specific projects, requiring estimation by government of additional abatement relative to ‘business as usual’. However, if not carefully implemented, project-specific approaches can involve administrative overheads for both government and project proponents.

Under a market based mechanism, like an ETS, if a firm reduces its emissions intensity by acquiring more efficient equipment or, for example, by generating power from burning gas rather than coal, it will need to buy fewer permits per dollar of output. There is a clear, transparent and immediate incentive—a clear price signal—encouraging investment in lower emissions technology. However, if a scheme operates whereby the government pays the firm to reduce its emissions intensity, leaving aside the impact on the budget and the demand therefore for higher taxes, there is firstly going to be a substantial and contentious debate about what the correct baseline is, and then whether it will actually be reduced. Because most capital equipment, especially in the energy sector, has a life running into many decades, as long as 50 years in some cases, the business sector is going to require assurance that any government subsidy will match the life of the asset—so running well beyond 2020. In other words, any scheme has to have a lifetime which matches the lifetime of the investment. If government wants business to make long-term investments to lower emissions, its commitment must be long term as well, which is why a subsidy scheme which terminates in 2020 will achieve very little. Arguments of considerable ferocity will arise as to whether a new piece of equipment would have been bought anyway, with the risk that the government ends up funnelling billions of dollars to companies to subsidise their profit without achieving any real additional cuts in emissions.

All of us in this House know that industries and businesses, attended by an army of lobbyists, are particularly persuasive and all too effective at getting their sticky fingers into the taxpayers’ pocket. Having the government pick projects for subsidy is a recipe for fiscal recklessness on a grand scale, and there will always be a temptation for projects to be selected for their political appeal. In short, having the government pay for emissions abatement, as opposed to the polluting industries themselves, is a slippery slope which can only result in higher taxes and more costly and less effective abatement of emissions. I say this as a member and former leader of a political party whose core values are a commitment to free markets and free enterprise. The Shergold report went on to say this about this very issue:

Financing subsidies and specific project-based interventions also impose costs on society from their use of taxation. If these approaches were to be used extensively to achieve large-scale abatement, the economy would suffer losses in economic and administrative efficiency. In contrast, market-based approaches to emissions abatement involve the explicit pricing of emissions, allowing the market to determine the cheapest source of emissions reduction.

As the Productivity Commission observed in its submission to the Garnaut review in 2008:

Unlike prescriptive command and control approaches, an ETS leaves it to producers and consumers—who have better information about their own production costs and preferences than governments—to work out the most cost-effective way to reduce emissions. In this way, the targets are most likely to be achieved at lowest cost to the economy and community.

Before I leave the question of non-market based approaches to emissions reduction, I should note that I was very pleased to see the
recognition of soil carbon, carbon forestry and biochar in the coalition’s alternative policy. One of the key achievements of our negotiations with the government last year about the CPRS of course was to secure the recognition of this type of agricultural offset, the potential for which, as I have argued for some time, is very considerable. However, there are a couple of points I should make about soil carbon in particular.

While it is possible to increase the level of organic carbon in soils by changing the management of the land in question, it is quite another thing to ensure that this increased carbon level is permanently maintained. Soil carbon levels fluctuate with the season, with rainfall and of course depending on the use of the land. There is a great prize here, but before billions of dollars are invested in soil carbon credits there will be considerable work required to agree on appropriate measurement and management methodologies. If in fact there are hundreds of millions of tonnes of very low-cost agricultural offsets capable of generating carbon credits then they are all potentially available in the ETS—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! May I ask the member for Wentworth to resume his seat. The Parliamentary Secretary for Employment on a point of order?

Mr Clare—I move:
That the member’s time be extended.

Question agreed to.

Mr TURNBULL—I thank the parliamentary secretary for his courtesy. As I said, if in fact there are hundreds of millions of tonnes of very low-cost agricultural offsets capable of generating carbon credits then they are all potentially available in this ETS, in the CPRS proposed here in this legislation, and they will lower the cost of permits. In other words, if polluters can buy carbon credits for $10 a tonne from farmers, permit prices will adjust down to that level. Of course, the great virtue of a market based scheme is that instead of the government decreeing what the best and cheapest offsets are, the participants in the market work it out for themselves. That is why, once agricultural offsets are recognised under the emissions trading scheme—and that is the plan with this legislation—there is enormous potential for farmers and other landowners to generate real revenue. However, it should be noted that until those offsets are recognised internationally, they will not be of assistance in meeting our five per cent 2020 target.

One of the leading Australian biochar advocates wrote to me the other day and said:

While I worked in Government for a significant part of my life I am horrified by the prospect of a ‘fund’ from which public servants give handouts to grow trees—it just does not work—we have to have a market price and a market system …

Is the ETS proposed in these bills the right design and is this the right time to act? The answer here, too, is yes. Most other large emitters have also committed to substantial quantitative reductions in their greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade. Many have already acted to achieve those targets. The European Union has had an ETS since 2005 and in phase 3 of its scheme is enforcing it with increasing stringency. In line with the Copenhagen accord, China has committed to a 45 per cent reduction in emissions per unit of output by 2020 and the Chinese are already investing massively in cleaner energy sources, both of which point to a ‘shadow’ price on carbon already in force across the Chinese economy.

I note that the Chinese commitment is to reduce emissions from their ‘business as usual’ rate. They recognise that business as usual is not good enough and that they must reduce their emissions intensity and then reduce the absolute level of emissions. Japan has pursued lower emissions and higher en-
nergy efficiency for three decades. Brazil has committed to lowering its emissions by more than a third against its projected business-as-usual 2020 emissions. I note again that our commitment to reducing our emissions by five per cent from 2000 levels is equivalent to a 21 per cent reduction from our projected 2020 emissions without a CPRS.

While Copenhagen was disappointing, it did nonetheless for the first time see the developing nations—particularly the major ones, such as China and India—make commitments to reduce their emissions. That was an enormous breakthrough. There is a global commitment to act so as to keep temperature rises this century below two degrees Celsius. The notion that this ETS would put Australia out in front of the world is, sadly—I wish it were not so—completely wrong. Far from being in front of the world in action to reduce emissions, we start behind because our per capita emissions are so large and because our sources of energy are overwhelmingly dependent on burning coal. We should not forget that when the Howard government committed to an ETS in 2007 the world was much further away from concerted global action than it is today. Indeed, the Shergold report noted:

The prospects for comprehensive global action in the near future look poor.

But the Shergold report, in recommending an ETS, observed:

...waiting until a truly global response emerges before imposing an emissions cap will place costs on Australia by increasing business uncertainty and delaying or losing investment.

This legislation is the only policy on offer which can credibly enable us to meet our commitment to a five per cent cut to emissions by 2020 and also has the flexibility to enable us to move to higher cuts when they are warranted. So for those reasons I support this bill. The arguments I have made for it are no different to those I have made, and stood for, for the last three years.

During my time as Leader of the Opposition I often defended the right of my colleagues from time to time to cross the floor and vote in accordance with their strongly held personal beliefs. This is a longstanding and treasured principle of the Liberal Party and very different to the tradition of the Labor Party. In that context, I commend the courage of my colleagues Senator Troeth and Senator Boyce who crossed the floor to support this bill and effective action on climate change late last year. The importance of this issue, the expectation that Australians have that their parliamentarians will lead on it, the fact that the emissions trading scheme being considered is nearly identical to the proposal put to the electorate by the Howard government in 2007 and my strong and longstanding personal commitment to effective action on climate change make it impossible for me to vote against this bill, amended in terms as agreed between the coalition and the government last year.

The proposed ETS is a balanced, substantive and timely step forward on an issue of immense importance. By relying so heavily on market forces to address this very severe challenging problem, the ETS is far more in the great traditions of modern liberalism than any other available policy response. After all, I have always believed that Liberals reject the idea that government knows best and embrace the idea that government’s job is to enable each of us to do our best. This ETS allows Australian businesses to make their own decisions as to how to reduce their emissions. Government sets the rules and, in particular, sets the cap on total emissions and then lets the market work out the most efficient and effective outcome. Schemes where bureaucrats and politicians pick technologies and winners, doling out billions of taxpayers’ dollars, neither are economically efficient
nor will be environmentally effective. For those reasons, I will be voting in favour of this legislation.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Higgins, I remind the House that this is the first speech of the honourable member for Higgins. I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins) (1.13 pm)—Today I rise in this chamber for the first time as the very humble yet proud member for Higgins. At the outset, I want to place on record my thanks to the people of Higgins for their trust in me to represent them. I will always honour that trust. They have in me, just as they had in the previous members for Higgins, someone who will work hard for them, who will listen to them and fight for them and who will respect and defend the values and traditions that have made this country great. Higgins has in me someone who will not make decisions ruled by fear or the short-term media cycle. To do so sacrifices the future of this country on the altar of political expediency today, for the decisions that we make today here in this parliament will shape our future. We face big challenges, and I will not duck the task of tackling those challenges.

Higgins has a strong tradition and a proud legacy. The people of Higgins have been represented well in the past—two prime ministers in Harold Holt and John Gorton, a strong local member in Roger Shipton and, most recently, a federal Treasurer in Peter Costello. Each man made a significant contribution to this country. Holt introduced the child endowment scheme, Gorton implemented a program to provide financial assistance to non-government schools and Shipton advocated on many small business issues. Family, choice, wealth creation—these threads bind the Higgins tradition.

In particular, I honour the contribution of my immediate predecessor, Peter Costello, a great Australian and a man who is both a mentor and a friend. Not only was he a much loved local member but his economic vision and achievements ensured a brighter future for all Australians. His legacy, while understood today, will be properly measured and appreciated in the years to come. Since Higgins has produced such giants of Australian politics, it is probably a good thing I am wearing heels.

Higgins is a lively inner city electorate, with landmarks like Chapel Street, the Yarra River and the Chadstone Shopping Centre. It is also a diverse electorate. Workers’ cottages abound in Windsor; flats and apartments dominate South Yarra. A vibrant gay community enlivens Prahran. Toorak has its mansions; Malvern, its parks and gardens. You cannot pass through Camberwell and Glen Iris without seeing children playing cricket or kick-to-kick. Parents push prams in Ashburton and Malvern East. The cafe culture is alive and well in Koornang Road, Carnegie and High Street, Armadale. Throughout, there is a deep vein of multiculturalism: some communities are particularly localised, like the strong Greek communities in Murrumbeena and Hughesdale; others, like our dynamic Jewish and Chinese communities, are spread throughout the electorate.

One thing, more than any other, binds this diversity together: aspiration. Higgins is full to the brim with aspiration—young couples, renting for the moment but desperate to own their own homes; families wanting the best for their children, scrimping and saving to provide them with the best opportunities in life; small business people, rolling up their sleeves, taking a chance and creating jobs; and older residents who have worked hard throughout their lives, whose accomplish-
ments prove what can happen when you dare to pursue your ambitions.

The story of Gwen Dixon and her late husband, Alec, is a classic Higgins story of aspiration. Alec was born in the early 1900s and lived in what was then the very working class suburb of Windsor, one of seven children. He left school at 14 and worked as a plumber’s apprentice before he got a job on the wharves. Years later, he met Gwen. They got married, rented a house and in true entrepreneurial fashion started a small business together. Gwen made felt ties; Alec sold them door-to-door. Keen to make a home for their family, they rented a shop in Windsor and started a milk bar. They worked in the shop during the day and lived above it at night. They took risks. They employed people. Later, they set up a grocery business, going into debt to buy a small shop in South Yarra, a business they worked in together for over 30 years.

When they could, Alec and Gwen moved to a house in Windsor, renting out half of it to make ends meet. They took one holiday in their working life and that was on their retirement. Instead, they put money back into their business and the education of their two children, sending them to independent schools in their secondary years to give them the educational opportunities that they themselves had been denied. Today, we are joined by 92-year-old Gwen Dixon in the public gallery. I could not have asked for a finer grandmother.

The same spirit of aspiration that drove my grandparents drove my parents. The first of their families to go to university, they worked hard and sacrificed to give me and my siblings a quality education. If not for their love and sacrifice, I would not be standing here today.

I joined the Liberal Party because we are the party which helps people to fulfil their aspirations; those opposite are just as likely to stamp them out. In my view, the best path to our collective prosperity involves giving individuals, families and businesses the freedom, opportunity, and encouragement to build and secure their own futures. That is why I am here. I want to create the best possible environment that allows people to pursue their aspirations and one that values family as the bedrock of our society—to be nurtured and protected.

Believers in big government think Canberra can and should solve every problem. I do not accept this. Government action invariably involves some concession of liberty to the state. But that concession should be limited to what is vital. Canberra simply cannot know what is best for every person and every situation. The brainpower of 22 million people, each given the freedom to create solutions for their families and communities and to create businesses which create jobs, will always yield better outcomes. Always.

When government does act, it should look to maximise choice and opportunity. Non-government alternatives are important. We need to encourage private health care, private health insurance and independent schools, not undermine them. At the same time, it is critical to have strong public health and public school systems. We need to demand excellence and achievement from both to ensure real opportunities for all Australians.

Basic fairness and compassion mean a strong social safety net is essential. But I want as few people as possible to rely on it. In particular, we need to break the nexus of intergenerational welfare dependency, a problem tragically apparent in some of our Indigenous communities and, equally tragically, not confined there. Our policies must encourage self-reliance and resilience. Social policy cannot be implemented without a
strong economy. A strong economy is the ultimate form of social policy—with it comes the chance of a job and a higher standard of living; the chance to fulfil aspirations.

This brings me to the first key set of issues that I want to touch on today. This side of the House has a proud history of strong economic management. Indeed, it seems that one of our defining roles as a political party is to repair the national balance sheet and to restore a framework that encourages productivity and growth. Unfortunately, one of the challenges that will face a future coalition government will be the same challenge that faced the last one: paying off Labor’s debt. While some form of stimulus package was appropriate in response to the global financial crisis, the current government’s package was excessive and poorly targeted. As a result, present and future generations face higher taxes to pay the interest bill. At a time when our population is ageing, money will be diverted from critical health, aged care and infrastructure budgets.

At the risk of oversimplification, the main reasons why Australia has performed well to date through the global financial crisis are because Australia was in a net cash position heading into it, because our monetary policy was, by and large, appropriately managed over a sustained period by our independent Reserve Bank; because our banking and prudential system was first class; and because we had a strong bilateral trade relationship with China which enabled us to piggyback on her own massive stimulus spending. These are all achievements of this side of the House. Let there be no doubt—I am for less debt and for living within our means. I am for a strong economy.

There will always be those who use a crisis to further their own agendas. Already the government has gone beyond its mandate at the last election and significantly reregulated the labour market in a way which will smother our competitiveness and jobs growth over time. We cannot afford to repeat this mistake in our financial markets. I have long taken an interest in markets policy and regulation as a lawyer, as a policy adviser and most recently in the finance industry. A sober review is appropriate and it may be that some improvements can be made. However, a wholesale reregulation of our financial markets would undermine the companies and industries which are so fundamental to our growth. In this place I will seek to maximise the competitiveness of our economy and our productivity, not to undermine them.

One area which is critical to this is taxation policy. We need to attract foreign investment; we need to attract the best talent from offshore; and, equally importantly, we need to retain our own talent. That requires a competitive taxation system, not a populist one. We need a taxation system that is not simply a merry-go-round of money but one that promotes workforce participation and wealth creation. This is all the more critical given the projections for our population size and composition set out in the latest Intergenerational report. It is clear we need to provide incentives for people to save and to stay in the workforce longer.

We all await the release of the Henry review into taxation and the government’s response. The challenge for the government is not simply to use the Henry review as an excuse to introduce higher taxes in its bid to find new revenue, nor should it introduce new taxes which would pull the rug out from under our all-important resources sector. Each would be the wrong response and would undermine the competitiveness of our economy. More importantly, lower taxation is fundamentally the right thing. Once the basic services of government are funded,
individuals are best placed to choose how they spend their money.

The second key set of issues I want to touch upon concerns innovation, a natural product of aspiration and a key to Australia’s future. Australia’s prosperity has been built on both our people and on our abundant natural wealth. However, our mineral resources are finite, and changes to our climate and water scarcity pose ongoing challenges for agriculture. Put simply, we cannot assume that our natural wealth will underpin our long-term prosperity. Our mining and farming sectors will remain critical for years to come. But now is the time for our country to invest significantly in education which drives productivity and innovation. Government needs to encourage new businesses and industries to flourish.

Innovation should also be a core plank in our strategies to address the twin challenges of energy security and climate change. Both are critical issues facing not just this country but countries all over the world. For many years Australians have led the way in medical research. There is no reason why we cannot lead the way in energy research. Indeed we are uniquely placed to develop solar, wind, geothermal, clean coal and innovative water solutions to maximise our energy independence and to reduce our impact on the environment.

Climate change is not the only area of environmental policy where action is required. As our population grows, our water supply has been and will continue to be increasingly stretched. National leadership is required. Future generations of Australians will rightly condemn us if we hide behind our federal system as an excuse for inaction.

The structure of our Federation has not kept pace with developments in water policy. To our great shame, the Murray-Darling Basin is a looming environmental catastrophe. If the states are not willing to refer their powers on water onto Canberra, a referendum will be necessary. But I do not agree with those who would use this as a Trojan Horse to centralise ever-increasing power in Canberra in other areas. While it is right to ask how our Federation can work better, we must be careful not to undermine the elaborate system of checks and balances which has sustained Australia as one of the world’s great democracies.

Energy and water security are by no means our only national security challenges. We face instability in our region and beyond. The threat of terrorism is ever present, both through traditional means and emerging threats such as cyber attacks. We must continue to invest in Australia’s defence infrastructure, but recognise that this alone is not enough. Our alliances have been critical in the past, are essential today and will continue to protect us into the future. But so too will investment in our region: in democratic structures and institutions, and in foreign aid—not just because foreign aid is morally right, but because of the huge national security benefits that it brings. Above all, we must maintain our vigilance.

I spoke earlier of families as the bedrock of our society. The changing nature of work poses particular challenges to the aspirations of families across this country. Families come in all shapes and sizes, and roles within families vary. A woman is increasingly likely to be the only, primary or co-breadwinner, whether by choice or necessity. Parents are having children later in life and then trying to balance parenting with their careers. Increasingly, grandparents are taking on more of the parenting responsibility. This creates enormous challenges. We want mothers, fathers and grandparents investing time in their children and grandchildren’s development. But we also want our best people in the workforce, adding to our productive output.
No-one has yet worked out how to be in two places at once—so there are no simple solutions. Indeed, the right solutions vary from family to family. In some cases, the right solution will be for one parent to stay at home as a full-time carer. In others, both parents will need to work or want to work. Governments should not discriminate amongst different family arrangements or put in place incentives which cause discrimination by others. It is important for our businesses to offer the flexibility necessary to allow our best and brightest to contribute both to the ongoing growth of their businesses and to the ongoing nurturing of our young.

But families are not just about parents caring for children; they are also about children caring for parents. Similar principles apply. Senior Australians built this country through their aspiration, sweat and taxes. They have a right to dignity and security. At the heart of this is flexibility and choice—giving power to older Australians and their families to determine their future according to their needs.

These are some of the national issues which drive me and which should occupy the attention of this place in the years to come. But local issues are also important to my constituents. It is tempting for federal politicians to say that local issues are not ‘our issues’. I do not accept that. I will continue to campaign to help those crying out for better community safety through closed-circuit television cameras in Prahran and more police in Ashburton. With my community, I will continue to fight state Labor’s flawed planning policies which are damaging the character of our area. In short, I will be an advocate for the people of Higgins, on local issues as well as national ones.

No-one who stands before this House does so without the support of a great many people. Let me start by thanking my wonderful team in Higgins and all of the volunteers, supporters and staff of the Liberal Party who worked so tirelessly on my campaign. I am blessed to have so many wonderful friends. I am not so foolhardy as to attempt to list them all today, but each has enriched my life and I thank them all. Some of those friends are now colleagues here and in the other place. I have valued their counsel for many years, but I have valued their friendships even more. I am excited to join them, and my other new colleagues, to strike a blow for Liberalism and good government.

Of course, it would be hard to embark on this life without the love and support of a strong family. I have both. I pay tribute to my parents, Karen and Dan O’Dwyer; and I can always count on my siblings, Kate, Tom and Nicki, to be there, through everything, and to keep it real.

I would not be here today without the love, encouragement and advice of my husband, Jon, whom I met at university 15 years ago and who shares this political passion with me. I am so happy to be on life’s journey with him.

I will never forget that politics is about people and that people can make a difference. That is why I am here. I look forward to playing my part in building an even better Australia and thank the House for its indulgence.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (1.33 pm)—I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the member for Higgins on her first speech. I note that the Liberal Party’s poll ratings have improved since she replaced the previous member for Higgins and I wish her well in her important task of representing the voters of that electorate. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of the speaker before her in this debate on the second reading of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010, the member for Wen-
tworth. It was one of the most outstanding speeches that we have heard in this parliament in recent years, both for its courage and for its logic. That the truth on climate change is inconvenient has been famously said, but the fact that the member for Wentworth has shown this willingness to follow the truth wherever it might lead adds immeasurably to his stature as a parliamentarian.

Yesterday was the one-year anniversary of Victoria’s Black Saturday bushfires—a moving outpouring of emotion and grief at unimaginable horror and loss: 173 lives lost, thousands of homes and properties destroyed, the work and the memories of a lifetime vanished, reduced to rubble. It was also a great testimony to the power of the human spirit to endure and continue. Black Saturday was the hottest day that many parts of Victoria have ever experienced—46.4 degrees Celsius in Melbourne. It happened following a decade of drought. It happened at end of the hottest decade Australia has ever witnessed—and each successive decade in Australia in recent times has been warmer than the last. In the words of the old Buffalo Springfield song: ‘There’s something happening here.’

Climate change is not some vague scientific theory about what might happen in 100 years time; it is a reality happening right here, right now, in Australia. Bob Dylan sang, ‘The times they are a-changin,’ and they are. He also sang, ‘You better start swimmin’ or you’ll sink like a stone.’ That is true too. The impacts of global warming are serious and they are worldwide. In Canada, the Winter Olympics have run into problems because a very warm winter has meant little or no snow cover on mountains where events are scheduled to be held. Training sessions for competitors have been cut back so as not to damage the snow that is there. It is not just the melting snow of the North Pole and Mount Kilimanjaro and the snowfields; glaciers are melting too. This will cause floods in places like Tibet, Bangladesh and China, displacing millions of people, causing boat people and refugees. It will also cause food shortages once the water has gone. We will also see food shortages arising from drought. We can already see it here in the Murray-Darling Basin. We now hand out billions of dollars in taxpayer assistance to farmers every year on account of these so-called exceptional circumstances, which just keep happening.

If we do not do act now, we will leave to our children and to their children a bleak future with sea level rises and food and water shortages—a future regularly punctuated by extreme weather events such as cyclones, droughts and firestorms like the Black Saturday inferno. So this clutching at straws that we have seen in recent times, in the face of the considered opinion of such moderate, cautious and well-informed agencies as the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology—to say nothing of the thousands of scientists around the world who have studied the ice cores, studied the changing composition of the atmosphere and studied the planet’s temperature, rainfall and climate records—is utterly irresponsible. It is recklessness. It is indifference towards the future. To say that all the work we have seen does not mean anything is just wilful blindness. It is a terrible sell-out of our obligation to future generations. The only explanation I can offer for it is the saying that ‘it is pretty hard to get a man to see something when his pay packet depends on his not seeing it’.

As an example of the kind of thinking I am concerned about, I want to bring to the attention of the parliament a letter, dated 23 November last year, which I and, I assume, every federal MP received from True Energy Australia Pty Ltd, opposing the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme—that is to say, opposing the bills we are now debating. In
the letter, True Energy says it is a subsidiary of CLP, which is listed in Hong Kong, and it is a global investor with significant investments throughout the Asia-Pacific and a market capitalisation of $18 billion. The letter states that True Energy's parent company, CLP, owns the 1,480 megawatt coal fired Yallourn power station. Disturbingly, the letter claims that the federal government is in danger of breaking an agreement with China, exposing it to a claim for many hundreds of millions of dollars. The letter claims that the Australia-Hong Kong bilateral investment treaty obligates the federal government to ensure that investments made in good faith by Hong Kong companies are properly treated. The letter goes on to say that, consequently, if the CPRS results in a major devaluation of a Hong Kong investment—such as the 1,480 megawatt coal-fired Yallourn power station owned by True Energy's parent, CLP—the investor would have rights to take legal action against the Australian government to recoup losses, which would be significant.

I do not believe this is legally correct; but, if it is, it is an outrageous fetter on Australian sovereignty. We should not be entering into agreements which stop us taking action to protect our environment or limit us taking action to pass on to our kids an Australia that is in as good shape as the Australia that our parents gave to us. This kind of bullying by foreign companies displays a complete lack of concern for Australia's national interest and it shows the downside of allowing Australia's energy companies to be foreign owned. Energy companies have no business complaining that action on climate change might impact on their bottom line. In the first place, in the design of this legislation—both in its initial version and, even more so, following negotiations with the opposition last year—the government has gone out of its way to cushion energy companies from the impact of the change and provide a transitional path to a carbon constrained economy. Secondly, these companies have been on notice for years that the world needs to and wants to move away from fossil fuels. The previous Labor government announced a policy to cut carbon emissions. The Kyoto protocol was adopted way back in 1997. Energy companies have been on notice for years that this was coming. Warren Buffett said: 'When the tide goes out you can see who’s been swimming naked'—and that applies here. Energy companies have indeed been swimming naked—failing to move to renewable energy sources—and it is high time they put on some clothes.

The opposition has reneged on its pre-2007 election position that it would bring in a carbon trading scheme, and now says it will not support any type of carbon trading scheme. All those opposite, except the member for Wentworth, have forgotten about this commitment. The new Leader of the Opposition has produced an alternative plan, but this plan will not cut carbon emissions. It has no cap. It has no enforcement arrangements. It is a recipe for increasing carbon emissions, when we need to reduce them. The Leader of the Opposition is fiddling while Australia and the planet burns. His policy is all about delivering to those in the Liberal Party room—that climate sceptic tank—who voted for him. The Leader of the Opposition will never seriously tackle global warming. His heart is just not in it.

There has been some polling released today which has been reported as reflecting support for the Leader of the Opposition's position. Let me make two observations about this polling. Firstly, it shows that the emissions trading scheme is supported by 56 per cent of those polled. So there is a clear majority who continue to support the bills that we are debating now. Furthermore, when people were asked to choose between the
approach of the Prime Minister and the approach of the Leader of the Opposition to climate change, 43 per cent preferred the Prime Minister’s approach and 30 per cent preferred the Leader of the Opposition’s approach. So those who would like us to become a nation of climate sceptics need not break out the champagne just yet.

Secondly, it is perhaps true that the climate change cause has taken a bit of a hit in the wake of the Copenhagen talks—and I will have a bit more to say about those talks presently. It is foreseeable that some people will ask the question: ‘Why should we take action if other countries aren’t taking action themselves?’ It is a reasonable question, but ultimately it is a counsel of despair. If we take the view that we are not going to do anything until everybody else does, then the planet will go to hell in a hand basket. This would be a monumental failure of leadership; it would be a monumental abdication of our responsibility as members of this parliament. I think the time has come for people of goodwill around the world to think about penalties for those nations which refuse to pull their weight over global warming. I will leave that discussion for another occasion. But, in the first place, we have to pull our weight; we have to come to this discussion with clean hands. And this means starting to reduce our greenhouse emissions, as many nations in Europe and around the world are doing.

I acknowledge that Copenhagen was a failure. There is no purpose served by trying to pretend otherwise. As Mark Lynas said in the Guardian, after all the hope and all the hype, the mobilisation of thousands, a wave of optimism crashed against the rock of global power politics, fell back and drained away. Mark Lynas was attached to one of the delegations and present during the behind closed doors negotiations at Copenhagen. He has reported on what happened as follows, and I think it is something that the House ought to be cognisant of. He said:

China wrecked the talks, intentionally humiliated Barack Obama and insisted on an awful ‘deal’ so Western leaders would walk away carrying the blame. …

China’s strategy was simple: block the open negotiations for two weeks and then ensure that the closed-door deal made it look as if the West had failed the world’s poor once again.

Mr Lynas said Sudan behaved at the talks as a puppet of China:

…one of a number of countries that relieves the Chinese delegation of having to fight its battles in open sessions. It was a perfect stitch-up. China gutted the deal behind the scenes and then left its proxies to savage it in public.

Mr Lynas said that at late-night meetings as the heads of state from two dozen countries met behind closed doors Barack Obama was present for hours with Gordon Brown and other prime ministers, including the Danish Prime Minister, who chaired the talks, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Only about 50 or 60 people were in the room. The Chinese Premier, Wen Jinbao, did not attend the meetings personally, instead sending a second-tier Foreign Ministry official to sit opposite Obama. Mr Lynas said the diplomatic snub was obvious and brutal, as were the practical consequences. Several times during the session the world’s most powerful heads of state were forced to wait around while the Chinese delegate went off to make telephone calls to his superiors. Mr Lynas said:

It was China’s representative who insisted that industrialised country targets previously agreed as an 80 per cent cut by 2050, very serious targets, be taken out of the deal. ‘Why can’t we even mention our own targets,’ asked German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Brazil’s representative also pointed out that this position was illogical. Why should rich countries not announce this unilateral cut?
But the Chinese delegate blocked it. Mark Lynas said this is because China did not want the talks to succeed and wanted the rich countries to get the blame for Copenhagen’s lack of ambition. He said:

China, backed at times by India, then proceeded to take out all the numbers that mattered. A 2020 peaking year in global emissions, essential to restrain temperatures to two degrees Celsius, was removed and replaced by woolly language suggesting that emissions should peak ‘as soon as possible’. The long-term target, of global 50 per cent cuts by 2050, was also excised.

Mark Lynas said no-one else, perhaps with the exception of India and Saudi Arabia, wanted this to happen. The Chinese delegate also moved to remove the 1.5 degrees Celsius target so beloved of the small island states and low-lying nations who have most to lose from rising seas. He said:

President Nasheed of the Maldives, supported by the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, fought valiantly to save this crucial number. ‘How can you ask my country to go extinct?’ demanded President Nasheed. The Chinese delegate feigned great offence—and the number stayed, but surrounded by language which makes it all but meaningless.

It is clear to me that the talks failed to achieve anything like the action that is needed to stop the earth’s temperature from rising to dangerous levels with unpredictable consequences and that the dynamics at work which are preventing global agreement need to be shifted or else the crippling impasse at Copenhagen will continue indefinitely.

That is no excuse for Australia to sit on its hands now. Previously when the Howard government was sitting on its hands and refusing to act on climate change the states stepped up to fill the vacuum and started to put in place their own arrangements and mechanisms. I think this will happen again if the Senate insists on blocking action to reduce carbon emissions. A vacuum will be created and the states will move to fill it, as they did before. It is not just nature that abhors a vacuum; politicians do too. The states can either move in a regulatory direction such as requiring new buildings to install solar panels and things like that—and the opposition could hardly complain about this given that they have said that they prefer direct government action to the market—or the states may act as before to introduce their own emissions trading regimes, which they have suspended and put on hold since the election of the federal Labor government.

The opposition would only have itself to blame should this occur.

People complain that this creates costs for business, but no-one has ever claimed that action to tackle global heating would be cost free. What we have said is that Nicholas Stern is right: the cost of inaction will exceed the cost of action. At present the costs of inaction are being borne randomly and unfairly. They fall on the victims of bushfires and the victims of drought. They fall on the tourism industry of the Great Barrier Reef and the snowfields. In particular they fall on the tourism industry of the Great Barrier Reef and the snowfields. In particular they fall on the next generation and the one after that. These costs need to be shared fairly, and that is what carbon trading is all about. I do not think anyone sees carbon trading as a silver bullet to solve all the problems but rather as part of a suite of measures necessary to tackle a complicated, deep-rooted global problem. These measures include the increased renewable energy target and funding for research to reduce emissions from cars and from coal and from agriculture. I want to put in a plug here for energy efficiency. It does not get as much attention as some of the other initiatives but there is a lot of potential to reduce carbon emissions through the more efficient use of energy in housing and in transport. One of the reasons I will be voting for these bills is because I believe putting a price on carbon will help us drive energy
efficiency. I urge policymakers in both government and business to drive energy efficiency and tackle the culture of energy waste and profligacy which has sprung up in recent decades.

I believe that future generations are going to judge us on our performance over this issue. If we fail to make the difficult decisions and succumb to political opportunism and fear campaigns, I fear that we will not be given very high marks. I believe we have it in our capacity to do better, and I urge the House to support this legislation.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (1.52 pm)—I rise, I think for the third time in the last 12 months, to speak in the House on the complex issue of climate change. Today I rise to support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and associated bills. I repeat what I have said on previous occasions: this side of the House is committed to taking action on climate change. This side of the House believes that it is not only in our immediate interest but in the interests of those to whom we intend to bequeath our standards of living and our Australia in the future. It is one of those things that we ought not take for granted. As parents—and I imagine that there are many parents up in the galleries—we do want the best for our children. We see that in education and in just about every aspect of our lives. As parents we want to bequeath to our kids the same standards, if not better, than those we grew up with. That is a natural position for us as parents to take—maybe it is magnified in my case because I am a grandparent. We are looking for the betterment of the environment that we wish to leave to our families, to our future generations.

That is why this is a such a significant debate in this House. It is significant because it is something that we have already agreed to. As everyone here, including those who are in the galleries, are aware, it is not that long ago that a unanimous position was adopted that both the opposition and the government alike would work with the science of climate change and come up with a responsible and efficient mechanism by which we could approach it. I grant you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it was not necessarily the total solution, but it was certainly a positive direction in which we could move towards ameliorating the effects of climate change to protect future generations. We did that in company with the opposition, through the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Turnbull. As a matter of fact, we went on to have a series of negotiations with the opposition. Throughout these negotiations one of the crucial things was that the opposition agreed to put various amendments on the table—a series of amendments. As you would recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, we had already introduced our CPRS legislation and the opposition wanted a series of amendments.

Those discussions took place over a period of around six to eight weeks, and, wouldn’t you know it? We on this side of the House agreed with every single one of those amendments. In good faith bargaining you would say, ‘That’s a deal.’ But, no, we have come back here to find that members on the other side of the chamber now want to change not only what the deal was but also the rationale behind it. They disagreed, to the point that they changed leaders, that they went into a bona fide set of negotiations with us with a view to entering into an agreement if we could reach an accommodation on their specific amendments to the CPRS legislation.

As I said, we had actually reached an agreement. For some of us, I think, there might be certain views on whether our agreement should have been on all of the amendments. Nevertheless, we found an agreement through good-faith bargaining
with the other side of this chamber to work on those differences, and we agreed to a package which we say was a solution by which the CPRS could go forward. What do we see now? Scurrying around on the other side, as they want to slink off and disagree with the whole concept.

I do not know who the joke was played on, whether it was on this side of the House or on the Australian community, but these are the people who went to the 2007 election, under John Howard, with the notion for an energy trading system. That was one of their policies. The only difference they had with us on that, except in some of the detail, was that they wanted their policy introduced by 2012, whereas we had a position that ours must be introduced by 2010. During the course of the debate, they got to a midway point where they said they would agree to an energy trading system provided it could be introduced by 2011. There was always going to be that difference.

This is the same mob who come in here today and want to argue against the CPRS. There will be a litany of reasons as to why they oppose it. What this mechanism will do is put a price on carbon, which will allow the market to determine the price. I would have thought that having the market involved in determining the price of carbon would be appealing to the general philosophy of the Liberals. Clearly, in this instance, it is not. The reason it is not is that they were opposed outright to having any form of price put on carbon, opposed outright to having any form of ETS established, because they wanted to change the policies when they changed leaders of the party.

As I have said, this is a very significant debate. It is a debate not just about Australia here and now but about Australia in the future. Either we stand and be counted and make a difference or we invite the question: why are we here? I listened intently to the first speech of the member for Higgins. Despite the fact that we might have some differences in political outlook, I gathered from her speech, and I compliment her on it, that she is here to make a difference. I would think it goes without saying that every member of this chamber is in politics in order to make a difference. There cannot be any greater issue that we need to pursue at this stage—people have referred to it as the greatest moral issue of the time—than looking to the protection of our environment and address the effects of climate change. This is something that we need to focus on in building this country and setting a path for the future. To do that we need a solid suite of policies. At the centre of that is what was identified some time ago when the Stern report was brought down—that is, having an ETS established, one of the most efficient forms of regulation, putting a price on carbon and being able to generate the various low-carbon-emitting industries and technologies that flow from having a price on carbon.

I have had the opportunity of working for renewable energy companies in the past. I am still in contact with those companies now. I know their frustration in not having a price set on carbon and in not being able to commercialise their technologies for the benefit of this country. These are things that must be taken into account.

The SPEAKER—Order! In accordance with standing orders, the debate is interrupted. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour this day. The honourable member for Werriwa will have leave to continue his remarks.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I table for the information of the House a revised ministry list reflecting a
change to the ministry following the resigna-

tion of the Hon. Duncan Kerr SC, MP as the
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island
Affairs. Again, I wish to formally acknowledge to the parliament the contribution made by Duncan Kerr to Australia’s relationships with our neighbours in the Pacific and thank him for his service. I seek leave to have the document incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

*The document read as follows—*

**RUDD MINISTRY**

14 December 2009

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
<th>Other Chamber</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change and Water</td>
<td>The Hon Penny Wong</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
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<td>Cabinet Secretary (Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
<td>The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
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<td>Minister Assisting the Minister for Government Service Delivery</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
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<td>The Hon Anthony Byrne MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
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<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Robert McClelland MP</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon John Faulkner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>The Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Climate Change in the Prime Minister’s portfolio and a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.

**Mr RUDD**—I inform the House that the Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery will be absent from question time today as he is attending the funeral in Alice Springs of Margaret Nelson, distinguished matriarch of the Northern Territory. The Minister for Health and Ageing will answer questions on his behalf.

**SHADOW MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.01 pm)—I table the coalition shadow ministry arrangements.

*The document read as follows—*

**COALITION SHADOW MINISTRY**

2 February 2010

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<th>TITLE</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon Nick Minchin</td>
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<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
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<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon David Johnston</td>
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<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Emerging Trade Markets</td>
<td>Mr Mark Coulton MP</td>
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<td>Mr Steven Ciobo</td>
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<td>The Hon Joe Hockey</td>
<td>Senator Barnaby Joyce</td>
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<td>Senator Mitch Fifield</td>
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<td>The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport Parliamentary Secretary for Education and School Curriculum Standards</td>
<td>Mr Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Population Policy</td>
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<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td>Dr Andrew Southcott MP</td>
<td>Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
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QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr ABBOTT (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm that, on the government’s own figures, a family with three children under 12 where one parent works as a correctional officer, on $62,486 a year, and the other parent works as a midwife, on $80,156 a year, will be $620 a year worse off under the Prime Minister’s great big new tax on everything?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question, as it goes to the impact of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme on families—a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme which he said only two months ago that he fully supported. The Shadow Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.

In addition, the Hon Philip Ruddock MP will act as Shadow Cabinet Secretary.
question of cost and compensation goes to the particular circumstances of a family. Let me go through this in some sequence. The Treasury advises that the average cost is expected to be 1.1 per cent in the first two years of the scheme. That is $12 a week or $624 per year for the average family. Secondly, the matter of compensation is provided for under our scheme for some 8.1 million of Australia’s 8.8 million families. Treasury advises that the average compensation for these families is $12.70 per week or $660 per year. There are 2.9 million households that will receive full assistance. Of the 3.7 million middle-income households, 50 per cent will receive full assistance. All middle-income families will receive some compensation. Over 92 per cent of households will receive assistance and, on average, these will receive assistance of around $660, as I mentioned before.

Now to the honourable member’s question concerning the family circumstances to which he has just referred. As he knows, and as the shadow Treasurer and others would know, the particular income profiles and compensation profiles of individual circumstances will depend on a dozen or so different variables. For families these will include, for example, the relative income split between one partner and another and, secondly, the number of children in a family. The third variable in all this is, of course, the government payments and allowances that the family may be receiving—for example, family tax benefit A or B, the age pension, the disability pension, carer payments, the veterans services pension, the war widows pension, unemployment benefits, student and youth allowances and eligibility for the low-income tax offset. These are all the variables which affect an individual family’s circumstances.

I will also say that if the honourable Leader of the Opposition would refer to the government’s white paper he would see that it makes reference to a transitional fund available for any family that is not compensated according to the government’s stated commitments. That is made plain there.

Finally, can I say in relation to this that full details on the CPRS household assistance package are on the relevant climate change website. Tables there show the impact on, and assistance for, the 27 different household types most common in Australia. Each type has more than 25 different income levels. Altogether, therefore, the tables refer to 600 different household scenarios. These are publicly available on the government’s website.

**Nation Building and Jobs Plan**

Ms SAFFIN (2.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister please update the House on recent information relating to the impact of the stimulus provided by the Nation Building and Jobs Plan on the Australian economy and Australian jobs?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Page for her question. The government are committed to building a stronger Australian economy and one that protects jobs and delivers for working families. That is why, in the face of the greatest global economic challenge since the Great Depression, we implemented a national infrastructure stimulus strategy, which is right now supporting more than 34,000 projects around the country. The result is that Australia (1) has been kept free of recession and (2) is the only one of the advanced economies that generated positive economic growth in the period 2008-09.

I draw the House’s attention to what the Reserve Bank had to say in their Statement on monetary policy last Friday. It contains new numbers on strengthening employment and on the issue of a strengthened economy. Firstly, on the growth point, it informs us that growth numbers have been revised up by
the bank to two per cent for 2009-10 and 3.5 per cent for 2010-11. This is good news for the Australian economy.

The government’s overriding objective is how we protect jobs in the face of this global economic recession. On employment, the RBA states that it now looks likely that the unemployment rate has peaked at around 5.75 per cent. If that number is realised, it is very good news indeed for Australian working families. The core objective of the government’s economic plan is to protect Australian jobs, and that is why we have 34,000 projects out there, underway through the national economic infrastructure stimulus plan.

Let us look more broadly at the impact of what we have done in Australia on jobs here, relative to other countries, to put it into context. Since the global recession began, the United States has lost 6.8 million jobs; the UK, 496,000; Germany, 136,000; Canada, 270,000; Japan, almost one million; France, 447,000; and Italy has lost 406,000 jobs. By contrast, Australia has gained 112,000 jobs over the last 12 months. The other thing I would say is this: contrast the performance on jobs with what has happened in previous international recessions. Here I think it is important as well to look historically at how governments have responded to this challenge. In the international recession of the early eighties, the unemployment rate in Australia peaked at 10.4 per cent. That was with global growth still positive at nearly one per cent. Then, in the international recession of the early nineties, we had the unemployment rate peaking at 10.9 per cent despite global growth still being positive at 1.5 per cent. In this current global recession, where we have the economy actually contracting, Australia has generated an unemployment rate of 5.8 per cent. What this demonstrates is that the policies of this government affecting jobs have been better than what we have seen in most other economies around the world and better than what we have done in response to previous recessions as well.

The other thing I would say in conclusion about the Reserve Bank’s statement last Friday is this: it pointed particularly to the impact of infrastructure stimulus as ‘an important offset’ to the weaknesses in several areas of the economy—a very important and significant finding. Furthermore, it said that the overall stimulus is currently being withdrawn, while noting that the pick-up in demand around the global economy is still patchy. And we note the IMF’s warning from last week which says that there should be no premature withdrawal of stimulus because the global economy is still in fact in a difficult situation.

To conclude, can I just say this: there is no clearer contrast between the government and the Liberal and National parties on the question of the economic management of the global recession and recovery. Those opposite—led by the Leader of the Opposition, who says he has no interest in economics and who made the extraordinary decision to appoint Senator Joyce as the alternative finance minister of Australia; leave that to one side—on the core of policy said this: they said we should never have had a national infrastructure stimulus strategy. Had we followed that advice, we would now be in recession and 200,000 Australian jobs would be lost. But the second point is this: on the question of judgment, the Leader of the Opposition, not learning from that mistake, now says, for the future, we should pull out another $20 billion worth of investment in national economic stimulus expenditure. That would also send us down the gurgler.

On the question of economic management, the government’s approach is clear-cut. We have responded to the global recession in a cogent way. What we have seen from the Leader of the Opposition is poor
Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr BILLSON (2.10 pm)—My question is to the 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. I refer the minister to the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal report, which found that electricity prices will rise by 60 per cent in New South Wales, with one-third of this massive price hike due to the government’s emissions trading scheme. How will this help a small business proprietor such as Jason of Bell’s Foxy’s Dry Cleaners, who I and the opposition leader visited this morning, who already pays $15,000 a year in electricity costs for his business? He is facing a $3,000 or more increase because of the government’s great big new tax on everything—a tax, a system, that provides no compensation for small business.

Dr EMERSON—I do thank the latest shadow minister for small business for his question. He certainly did not wait for the duration of the siege of Leningrad to ask that question. So he is really not ahead of the game but not as far behind the game as the former shadow minister.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has the call.

Dr EMERSON—Treasury estimates of increases in electricity prices associated with the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme are seven per cent in the first year and 12 per cent in the second year. The government will in fact assist Australian small businesses to adapt to a carbon constrained economy, and all revenue—every bit of revenue—from the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme will be used to help households and businesses to adjust to invest in clean energy options. The Treasury modelling is based on a passing through of the carbon price, and that is why the government is providing compensation to households.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance, and the standing order relevant to that. The minister is not being relevant in answering the question and dealing with this particular case that has been put to him, and is, indeed, misleading the parliament by trying to imply that he will receive compensation when he will not.

The SPEAKER—The member will resume her seat. She cannot add debate to a point of order. The minister is responding to the question.

Dr EMERSON—And I was going directly to the issue of support for small business under the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Already, $200 million has been allocated through the $1.97 billion Climate Change Action Fund—to help businesses, including small businesses, to invest in energy efficient equipment such as hot-water systems, insulation, lighting and heating. And, as part of the Clean Business Australia initiative, the government is providing $56 million for small- and medium-sized manufacturers, such as dry-cleaning operators, to improve the energy efficiency of their production processes. And they would do that by investing in more energy efficient equipment.

Mr Billson—Mr Speaker—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dunkley has not got the call because a num-
ber of people behind him are denying him. I call the member for Dunkley.

Mr Billson—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the question was not about grants the government gives away; it was about the electricity cost hikes and the lack of compensation.

The SPEAKER—Order! The point of order was on relevance. The minister is responding to the question.

Dr Emerson—That is how we will support small businesses in this country. If we are addressing the issue of risks to small business, there is no greater risk to small business in this country than the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow finance minister. The reason I say that is that the shadow finance minister, on Lateline just the other day when he was asked where he was going to get the revenue to fund his $10 billion climate change con job, referred to the Henry tax review—and what did he say? He said, ‘That is the whole mechanism of where we get the money from.’ Here is the shadow finance minister saying there will be at least a $10 billion increase in taxes or new taxes. He did not say, ‘Here is the budget; we are looking at the budget.’ He said, ‘We are looking at the Henry tax review,’ indicating in direct contradiction to the opposition leader that they would be getting the money out of the tax system, increasing taxes on small business in this country by up to $10 billion.

Mr Anthony Smith—Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: if the minister cannot answer the question put to him about the case study—

The SPEAKER—No. The member for Casey will resume his seat. In response to the two previous points of order I indicated that the minister was responding to the question. To this point of order I would suggest to the minister that he needs to relate his material to the question.

Dr Emerson—I am indeed, Mr Speaker. I am advised that, in relation to the issue of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and businesses that might be affected by higher energy bills, the shadow minister said that, if electricity prices increased because of penalties incurred under Mr Abbott’s plan, consumers could sign on with another retailer. There you go. So he is admitting that electricity prices would go up under the plan by this risky opposition leader saying they can just go to another electricity provider. The fact of the matter is that the shadow finance minister, in revealing there would be increased taxes to fund their climate change con job, has let the cat out of the bag—and what a dirty, smelly creature it is; what a dirty, smelly cat it is. The opposition leader is taking working families and small businesses to the cleaners with his climate change con job.

Migration

Ms Burke (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Social Inclusion. Deputy Prime Minister, how will the announced changes to Australia’s skilled migration scheme better secure our economic future? What are the public reactions to these changes?

Ms Gillard—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question. Today the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship made an important announcement about better targeting our skilled migration system to the skill needs of the Australian economy. In doing so the minister said:

We often hear that previous micro-economic reforms have laid the foundation of our current prosperity. Rarely do we hear recognition of the role played by Australia’s skilled migration program. It is the unsung achiever of prosperity … Skilled migrants are also good for the Budget bottom line, adding tens of millions more to tax
He explained—and these are very interesting figures—that migrants make up a quarter of the Australian population but account for around half of our doctors, dentists, IT specialists and chefs and more than a third of our pharmacists, geologists, mechanical engineers and painters and decorators. From those statistics and those words I think we can see there is no more important economic issue for the nation’s future than appropriately targeting our skilled migration program. That is why the government has today announced that we will scrap the Migration Occupations in Demand List and replace it with a new more targeted skills occupation list to be drawn up by Skills Australia in light of the nation’s needs for skilled labour.

This is a vital economic reform, but on this vital economic reform, like on all other economic reform questions, the opposition is deeply divided. I am asked about reactions to this announcement today. Of course, before this announcement we knew that the opposition was deeply divided on climate change and economic reform issues and that has been proved yet again today in the speech by the member for Wentworth and all of his silent supporters on the opposition benches who are now too afraid to come out and support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Before today we knew that the opposition are divided on the question of fiscal responsibility and dealing with debt and deficit.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—Now we have the shadow Treasurer interjecting. The shadow Treasurer is playing Tinkerbell rather than trying to manage the finances of the opposition, having been usurped by the shadow minister for finance. Now he is having to cope with the uncosted climate change con job of the Leader of the Opposition. We knew before today, when it comes to economic divisions in the opposition, that the division is so deep that the former Treasurer Peter Costello is on the record as saying that the Leader of the Opposition is so economically incompetent he would not have even tolerated him as his deputy.

Today, on an important economic issue of skilled migration, another division emerges. We have the Liberal senator Simon Birmingham criticising the government for not allowing enough skilled migration into the country, while the member for Bowman on the very same day comes out and criticises us for allowing too much skilled migration into the country. Not enough or too much? It is a central economic question on which the opposition are as deeply divided as they are on every other question. What this means is that members of the opposition are always available for a handy one-liner, but what they are never available for is the production of responsible, costed policies. I would say to the Leader of the Opposition, and it is a lesson as old as time: you cannot run the Australian economy if you cannot run your political party, and each and every day you fail that test—each and every day.
any family, no matter what the age of the children. Of course, what we are doing is recognising that families come in all shapes and sizes—except not children aged ‘six to 12 years’! What we are doing—

Opposition members—That’s how you describe them!

Ms MACKLIN—The government, through its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, is certainly proposing to use a wide range of mechanisms to provide support, and that is going to be cash assistance to low- and middle-income families. As the Prime Minister indicated before, we expect the average price impact to be 1.1 per cent, and the average impact for families—

Ms Julie Bishop—It’s always so complex, isn’t it?

Ms MACKLIN—I beg your pardon?

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will ignore the interjections. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting. The minister has the call.

Ms MACKLIN—The impact for families of our assistance will be in fact 2.5 per cent. So the average impact on the costs for families is 1.1 per cent; the average level of—

Mr Andrews—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I did not ask about averages. Is this family going to be $950 worse off? It is no joke. Answer the question!

The SPEAKER—The minister will resume her seat. The member for Menzies knows full well that is not the way to approach a point of order and he is warned. The minister has the call. She is responding to the question.

Ms MACKLIN—The big difference is this government intends to provide assistance to families as they meet the costs of climate change. The Liberal Party is providing none.

Mr Andrews—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the document with the government’s own tables, which stipulate ‘a child aged six to 12 years’.

Leave not granted.

Economy

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (2.28 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the closure of the bank guarantee?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Dobell for his question, because yesterday I announced a very significant milestone in Australia’s recovery from the worst global recession in 75 years. The government was acting on the advice of the Council of Financial Regulators and we will withdraw the guarantee from 31 March this financial year. I made it clear yesterday that the government’s Financial Claims Scheme will continue to provide—

Mr Pyne—On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I simply seek clarification from you about the fact that the Treasurer is doing a ministerial statement after question time on this very subject and is giving another ministerial statement now during question time. This is supposed to be a time for questions—

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. I am not in a position to give any clarification about any prospective ministerial statement. That will be dealt with by the House at the time we get to ministerial statements, and that is in the hands of the House. The only point of order that the Manager of Opposition Business could raise with me was whether the question was in order. The question was in order and the Treasurer will respond to the question.

Mr SWAN—We see the embarrassment of those on the other side of the House, who opposed this in this House—a measure that was so fundamental. Day after day, month after month they opposed the guarantee, they
rubbished it in this House, they came in here and asked question after question and they did not support it. This demonstrates why they have made such a fundamental misjudgment about the handling of the global recession. It goes to the very core of their lack of judgment. Everybody on this side of the House remembers very well, day after day, the opposition from those on that side of the House to a measure which did so much to support our financial system and our broader economy at a time of threat from the global financial crisis and what became the global recession.

This is a very serious issue, but those opposite are so embarrassed they have to get up and interrupt a relatively straightforward answer to this question. They are completely embarrassed by their bloody-minded opposition to the bank guarantee and to the term funding guarantee, which just demonstrates their lack of economic judgment. Without the guarantee, our banks would have lent less and interest rates for borrowers would have been far higher. That is the consequence of the guarantee. We were able to stabilise our banking system and ensure the flow of credit right through our economy. We can say today that Australia has been the only major advanced economy in the world that has avoided a recession and it has been one of the few to grow during that period.

Once again the lack of judgment from those opposite is obvious, because they not only opposed the bank guarantee in this House; they also opposed the stimulus back in February in this House, and of course they have continued to oppose the stimulus and have been out there suggesting that the stimulus should be withdrawn, which of course would pull the rug right out from underneath the recovery. Governor Stevens has summed this up all very well. This is what he had to say about the introduction of the bank guarantee:

... helped to stabilise what could have been a catastrophic loss of confidence in the global financial system ... public confidence in the security of the banking system maintained ... and stabilised a potentially quite dangerous situation.

You would have thought that something of that magnitude might have secured the continuous support in this House of the Liberal and National parties, but it did not. They opposed it tooth and nail in this House. What we are now seeing is a continuation of that irresponsible behaviour and that lack of judgment, which demonstrates what a risk all of those opposite are to our economic recovery.

We have had the Leader of the Opposition make unfunded commitments to the tune of $10.7 billion over five years at the same time as opposing the stimulus. The fact of the matter is that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand economics and regards it as boring, and that is simply a proxy for the fact he has not got the faintest idea what is going on in the economy. We have got the shadow Treasurer, who appeared on television last night wearing a crown, waving a magic wand and wrapping himself in a tutu, like a giant Tinkerbell! And, of course, we have got Senator Joyce. This is the least qualified economic team from any political party in this House for well over 30 years. They are demonstrating yet again their complete lack of judgment.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I would ask the Treasurer to table the page of Hansard showing that the coalition voted against the wholesale bank guarantee.

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

Mr Pyne—we didn’t vote against it!

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt, please!

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—
The SPEAKER—If the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has got something that she wishes to contribute to the proceedings then she can seek the call; otherwise I just make the gentle observation about her interjection that there are other forms of the House that she can use if she believes that to be the case.

The Manager of Opposition Business knows that he can ask for a document that has been quoted from to be tabled. He just cannot jump up willy-nilly asking for things to be tabled.

Asylum Seekers

Mr MORRISON (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I note that, since August 2008, 79 boats have arrived illegally in Australian waters carrying 3,618 passengers, including 11 boats carrying 647 passengers this year alone. Can the Prime Minister explain to the House why he has decided to make stopping skilled migrants coming to Australia a more important policy priority for his government than stopping illegal arrivals to Australia?

Mr RUDD—Can I simply say to the honourable member who has asked the question about migration policy that one of the problems that we have—

Mr Morrison—I’ve asked if you’re going to stop the boats, Kevin!

Mr RUDD—The honourable member asked a question about migration policy; I seek to respond to it. The problem that we have inherited with the skills system, as structured, of the previous government is that it is not properly tailored to the needs of the modern Australian economy. From the statement which has been issued by the immigration minister today, reinforced by the comments of the Deputy Prime Minister before, it is quite plain we need to adjust that for the future, because we want to get the right skills mix for the future needs of the economy. That is what we are on about; that is what we intend to do.

Secondly, I would say to the honourable member that the divisions on their side on migration policy were transparent for all to see in the doorstep interviews this morning.

Mr Morrison—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. My question was related to why the Prime Minister has given preference to stopping skilled migrants—

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

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member again for his question and for his interjection. The government’s commitment to our migration policy for the future is to deal with the future skill needs of our economy. The system of skills and the way in which it was structured through the immigration portfolio in the past does not meet the needs of the future; hence the decision concerning the 20,000, which has been publicised in the nation’s newspapers today. It is the right way forward, it is in the national interest and it is tailored to our real economic needs, and the government stands by that. Our border protection policy, as honourable members opposite would know, continues to deal with the practical challenges which we confront and which all previous governments have confronted since the 1970s.

Economy

Mr RAGUSE (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Minister, why is rigorous analysis and attention to detail crucial in economic and fiscal management, and what are the consequences if such approaches are not followed?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Forde for his question. Decisions and statements by government do influence the actions of investors and consumers and it is
therefore vital that economic ministers and the government do act and speak responsibly and accurately. It is also, of course, natural that this test should be applied to those who aspire to run the nation’s finances. Unfortunately, the new shadow minister for finance, Senator Joyce, has demonstrated on a number of occasions since he got the appointment from the Leader of the Opposition a serious lack of understanding or, indeed, accuracy in his statements. This demonstrates a very big question mark over the judgment of the Leader of the Opposition in appointing him in the first place, a very big question mark about the opposition’s capacity to manage the economy and the budget, and it does suggest that the election of an Abbott government would be a serious risk to the future prosperity of Australia.

I would just like to refer to a couple of the statements that Senator Joyce has made. He warned in December of the prospect of ‘economic Armageddon’ citing the threat to essential medicines and foods. He suggested that the United States might default on its debts. He suggested that various Australian state governments might default on their debts. He called for Australia’s major banks to be broken up. More recently, he has opposed Chinese investment in Australian companies, and today he said that Australia cannot afford an increase in the minimum wage, which of course has been frozen for some time as a result of the most recent decision of the Minimum Wage Panel of Fair Work Australia.

Had some of these statements been made by a finance minister, the ramifications for Australia could have been very serious, particularly were they to be made at a time of great economic crisis and stress such as this nation went through in the latter part of 2008 and for much of 2009—the global financial crisis. Some of these statements would have been front page news in newspapers all around the world, would have certainly undermined our relationship with the United States, would have called into question the state of the global economy and would have done enormous damage to Australia’s standing with investors both in this country and internationally. I would suggest that, when the Australian finance minister stands up and says that state governments may default, anybody with any sense of understanding of economics on that side—and there are very few—would understand that this poses a real threat to the stability of the Australian economy.

I know there is a tendency to dismiss Senator Joyce as something of an entertaining sideshow. He is now in a very different league. It appears that he has effectively taken over as the No. 1 spokesman on the economy from the opposition. We know from Niki Savva’s book that the Leader of the Opposition said to the former Treasurer Peter Costello that he was bored with economics. He was quoted in a newspaper article that he found it boring and, for that reason, Peter Costello indicated that he would rule out the Leader of the Opposition as a prospective deputy were he to become leader.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I wonder if the poor man’s Costello could become relevant to the question asked.

The SPEAKER—The minister is responding to the question.

Mr TANNER—From the poor woman’s Wilson Tuckey that’s a ripper! Senator Joyce has effectively taken over as the key economic spokesman for the Liberal Party. The Leader of the Opposition is not interested. The member for North Sydney, the shadow Treasurer, is out to lunch—we hardly ever hear from him at all on these issues. But, for all of these entertaining statements by Sena-
tor Joyce, Australians should be very concerned about the risk that he and the Leader of the Opposition pose to sound economic and budget management and to the future prosperity of this country.

I note that today the Leader of the Opposition has been holding forth on the good old days—the good old days of public hospital funding under the Howard government, to be precise. As I am sure members on this side will agree, the good old days are not quite what they are cracked up to be.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: The minister for finance has ranged over a wide range of issues and now he is discussing public hospital funding, which did not have anything to do with—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—When these members have ceased having their conversation, I will just call the minister, because obviously the member for Sturt is not interested in my response to him. He sat down and just babbled to the frontbench opposite him.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: obviously I am sorry about the cross-chamber conversation that was taking place, but there is an important point of relevance here. He was asked a question that had nothing whatsoever to do with public hospitals and he should be sat down if he is now ranging way outside the ambit of the question.

The SPEAKER—If the Leader of the Opposition were to look at the question, he would see it is characteristic of questions that are fairly open ended in the possibilities for the responses. I think it talked about—my writing is not good enough to be sure—‘rigorous attention to policy’ and terminology like that. Once again I am happy to hear these examples of the frustrations on both sides of the chamber. But I simply say in my comments to the Manager of Opposition Business: it is a bit riling when he makes a point of order and then enters into a cross-chamber battle before there is even a response to his point of order. There are plenty of people, not only in this place but also commentators, who think, by watching the trials of Speaker Bercow in the House of Commons, that these things are easy. But I wish I was in the position of Speaker Bercow, who, as I understand it, well and truly has terrific standing orders that do not allow points of order during question time. If that is what we want, I would be happy.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney is one of the ones who always want to babble on. I am simply saying to the whole chamber that if you want to change the nature of question time then perhaps it requires collective action of the House and a change of culture. If in fact you think that in other jurisdictions overseas there are answers, you might look to the culture—a culture that allows the primary question to be placed on the Notice Paper, where there is not this cross-chamber debate because there are no points of order and where the Prime Minister is not called upon to attend each question time. There are a whole host of possibilities, but it may be at some stage that the membership of this House will take it on board and not try to change the way the House is being conducted.

Mr TANNER—If the Leader of the Opposition and Manager of Opposition Business had allowed me to finish my sentence, they would have completely seen the relevance of the comment. That was that there is one aspect of the good old days that I do have some slight longing for. That is the days when the Liberal Party had some vaguely remotely credible economic spokespeople to
put its point of view. Whatever disagreements I might have had with people like Peter Costello, at least I would concede they knew something about what they were talking about. The unfortunate situation now is that we have the Liberal Party led by people who are completely uninterested in economics allowing people who know absolutely nothing about it to be their public representatives. (Time expired)

**Hospitals**

Mr ABBOTT (2.47 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his 2007 promise to fix public hospitals by 30 June last year or, if he did not, to take them over from the states. Why has this promise not been kept? If the Prime Minister cannot keep promises from 2007 why should anyone believe the promises he makes in 2010?

Mr RUDD—I welcome the beginning of the health and hospitals debate, because the member who was just on his feet was the man who as health minister for four years ripped $1 billion out of Australia’s public hospitals. We have before us now the man who as health minister for four years froze GP training places. We have before us at the moment the man who as health minister did nothing about the undersupply of nurses to the Australian health and hospital system.

Mr Abbott—Wrong.

Mr RUDD—To all of those he says, ‘Wrong, wrong, wrong.’ The bottom line is we now have a health and hospitals debate, and I welcome each day of it from this day forward.

The Leader of the Opposition was asked about this this morning. He put forward his strategy for the future on health and hospitals when he said, ‘I think many of them out there are wishing for the good old days.’ That is the pre-2007 days. That line was just referred to by the member for Melbourne. If the Leader of the Opposition has learned absolutely nothing about the state of our hospital system since exiting as health minister and the change in government, he has had his head buried in the sand.

Mr Anthony Smith—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The Prime Minister has not attempted to answer the question of why he has broken his election promise. He has been going for two minutes; it is about time—

The SPEAKER—The member for Casey will resume his seat. The Prime Minister knows his responsibility to be relevant to the question.

Mr RUDD—As I said before, I welcome the debate. I welcome what we have done in the two years that we have been in office and those opposite, I am sure, will welcome the reform plan we will unroll to the Australian public this year.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—Those opposite interject as though health and hospitals was their top priority for 12 years in office. Those 12 years in office saw them rip $1 billion out of the hospital system when the honourable member was the health minister. In the period that we have been in government, with the health minister at the helm, we have increased overall funding to the hospital system by 50 per cent. That is what we have done. We have also increased the training of GPs and nurses. We have invested significantly in cancer treatment and research. This is what we have done in two short years. As for the future plan which will be put to the states very soon, I say to those opposite that we will seek to achieve a compromise with the states on one thing.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order.
Mr Rudd—Those opposite seemed to relish the idea of achieving any kind of compromise with the states. The compromise that we have sought with the states is in one area—that is, bringing down—

Mr Anthony Smith interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Casey is warned.

Mr Rudd—the waiting times for elective surgery by pooling our funding to make a difference on the ground. Those opposite found that sort of compromise arrangement with the states for the last two years unacceptable. They find those sorts of compromises and cooperative arrangements for the future unacceptable. We have done it for elective surgery and we are doing it with emergency departments, with practical measures on the ground. But I say very clearly to this House: if the states and territories do not accept this year the reform proposals for the future, the government will take this matter to the Australian people as we have previously committed to doing.

I also say to those opposite, on the question of consistency—

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—Order! A question has been asked, the—

Mr Lindsay interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Herbert is warned. The Prime Minister is responding to the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—On the question of the Commonwealth's role in relation to health and hospitals, and our approach, which is a reform document for the nation to examine, there have been, firstly and secondly, six months of consultations by the health minister and myself with more than 100 hospitals across Australia—some of which the former health minister himself, when he was the health minister, never visited—and, thirdly, there is a decision-making framework with the states which will come to its conclusion very soon. I am very confident that those opposite, when they see what reform plan we have for the nation, will have a very stark choice indeed.

And let us remember, on the question of Commonwealth takeover, that there was a certain Leader of the Opposition, who was previously a health minister, who when asked about this question several years ago said that only one level of government should run the hospitals. He was advocating, then, a Commonwealth takeover of the hospitals. Then, when he becomes Leader of the Opposition, he backs away from it at a million miles an hour. It is a bit like last year backing the emissions trading scheme as Leader of the Opposition and this year saying that the emissions trading scheme is unacceptable. A few years ago he was backing a Commonwealth takeover of the hospital system; when he becomes Leader of the Opposition he pretends that that had never been uttered.

The government welcomes health and hospital reform. We have done more in two years than you did in 12 and the reform plan will be for you to back or oppose when the states and territories have reached their own decision in the immediate future.

Hospitals

Mr Perrett (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Can the minister update the House on the government's support for public hospitals and any alternative policies?

Ms Roxon—I welcome this opportunity and thank the member for Moreton for this question because he, as a member with very high demands in his electorate from the health system, will be very interested to be able to compare and contrast the record of
the government’s investments in public hospitals with the record of the Leader of the Opposition as a former health minister who cannot pretend that he was not intimately involved in every decision and every legacy left by the Howard government in our health system. We have spent the last two years rebuilding, block by block, after not just four years of this Leader of the Opposition being the health minister but also 12 years of a Howard government which neglected the system.

I can understand why the public responds very badly when they are reminded of Mr Abbott’s time as the health minister because one of the things that people remember most about Mr Abbott is that he pulled a billion dollars out of our public hospitals and then spent the next four years blaming the states for everything that went wrong. Compare and contrast ripping a billion dollars out of our hospitals to putting hundreds of millions of dollars into elective surgery and into emergency departments—billions of dollars into our public hospitals. This compare and contrast is a very easy thing to do.

Look at another thing that the Leader of the Opposition oversaw when he was the health minister: for all of the time that the Leader of the Opposition was the health minister the Howard government had a cap on the training places for GPs. This was despite the fact that 60 per cent of the country had a shortage of GPs. For four years as the health minister, Mr Abbott simply looked the other way and tried to pretend this was somebody else’s problem. We have already started to undo the damage caused by those years of neglect. We have increased the number of GP training places by 35 per cent. I am sure the public will want even more than that. We are taking action for things that the Leader of the Opposition neglected year after year after year.

Actually, it reminded me very much of a very familiar *Monty Python* script where it was fine to say that we have just cut off an arm as we rip a billion dollars out of our hospitals and we have cut off a leg as we have capped our GP training places, and the Leader of the Opposition just kept saying: ‘It’s only a flesh wound. Everything’s going to be fine; it’s just a flesh wound.’

*Mr Abbott interjecting—*

*Ms ROXON*—It is interesting that the Leader of the Opposition is asking about GP superclinics but the health spokesperson has not asked a question about GP superclinics. That is probably because one has opened in his electorate. Following a $2½ million dollar investment by our government in the member for Dickson’s seat, the Strathpine GP superclinic opened two weeks ago and is providing services to the community that otherwise turns up at Redcliffe, Caboolture and Prince Charles hospitals, where the emergency department presentations have gone up exponentially—at one of those hospitals by more than 20 per cent. In the member for Dickson’s electorate there is now a service that runs all day Saturday, all day Sunday and until seven o’clock every night during the week. The reason the shadow minister has been completely silent about it is that he did not even have the decency to turn up and congratulate them for providing these services to the community. The Leader of the Opposition is a risk. He has pulled money out of health. If he is elected, he will pull money out of health again, as his finance spokesperson has already made clear, and the public cannot afford that risk.

*Superannuation*

*Mr HOCKEY* (2.59 pm)—My question is the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his statement on radio 4BC just 12 days before the last election, when he said:
There will be no change to the superannuation laws—one jot, one tittle.

That is unlike you! I also refer the Prime Minister to his interview with Neil Mitchell last Friday, where he admitted that what he meant by this was ‘no substantive changes’. How can the Prime Minister dismiss slashing over $4 billion from superannuation support and cutting the superannuation co-contribution scheme for low-income families as ‘finetuning’? Given this is a blatant broken promise, if the Prime Minister cannot keep his 2007 election commitments, how can he be trusted with his 2010 election commitments?

Mr RUDD—On the question of superannuation, as the member for North Sydney would be aware, the changes which the government engineered were taken in order to ensure that we had a proper, balanced system for the future. Those opposite are ideologically opposed to it. We took a sober view in terms of the overall resources available to the budget and we engineered the changes that the honourable member has referred to. The key challenge for Australia for the future is to ensure that both our superannuation and our savings system are sustainable. Remember, one of the challenges of the ageing population is to ensure that that occurs. That goes to savings policies generally, pensions on the other hand and superannuation as well. That is why we have taken the actions that we have. Many of them have been unpopular. The government accepts that. But can I simply say, as a government which has a proud legacy in introducing superannuation to this country as a compulsory measure—opposed tooth and nail by those opposite, year after year, almost decade after decade—we are proud of our record on superannuation in the past and we intend to continue to support proper superannuation for Australians and retirees into the future.

Infrastructure

Mrs D’ATH (3.01 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Why is investment in infrastructure critical to Australia’s economic growth and productivity? Are there any risks to the government’s nation-building investment?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the honourable member for her question. The Rudd government is indeed investing in infrastructure, because we want to build a stronger economy for working families into the future. Today I announce that two more projects as part of our economic stimulus plan have been completed—two projects in the east-west corridor between Adelaide and Kalgoorlie. The $23 million projects, in which two new loop lines have been put in, will lead to practical productivity benefits in two ways. Firstly, they will allow trains of up to a kilometre and a half in length to operate along the track and, secondly, they will allow those longer trains to travel much more quickly—a big productivity benefit and dividend as a direct result of the economic stimulus plan.

But this is all at risk because today Senator Joyce has reaffirmed his view that cutbacks to infrastructure investment are on the opposition’s agenda. He has confirmed what the current Leader of the Opposition has said; he has confirmed what the former Leader of the Opposition has said: that cutbacks to infrastructure are on the agenda. But, of course, the coalition have got form, because when they last came to office, in 1996, they slashed $2 billion from the road budget over their first eight years. No wonder the Business Council of Australia have estimated that we inherited a $90 billion infrastructure deficit. Now the opposition wants to make more cuts—

Opposition members interjecting—
Mr ALBANESE—A $90 billion infrastructure deficit!

Mr Hockey—What a made-up figure!

Mr ALBANESE—It is from Business Council of Australia. We know those opposite want to argue with the business community, but that is what the BCA said. But, now that the coalition have walked away from market based economics, it is not surprising that they want to battle the Business Council of Australia.

Now we know that the opposition want to make more cuts or raise taxes to pay for their climate con job, because that is the only way that they can pay for it. We know on health that the Leader of the Opposition has said he wants to go backwards to the good old days when he cut $1 billion from hospitals. We know that they cut $2 billion from roads when they came into office. They need to say which projects they would cut that were part of the bring-forward of the economic stimulus plan. The Brighton Bypass in Tasmania—will they cut that? Will they cut the Northern Expressway in South Australia, the Western Ring Road in Melbourne or the Ipswich Motorway upgrade? We know that that is on their agenda because they have confirmed that is the case. What about the Pacific Motorway Transit Project on the Gold Coast, in South-East Queensland? The Bulahdelah Bypass in the electorate of Paterson—will they cut that? What about the duplication of the Douglas Arterial Road in Townsville in Queensland, the Tarocutta Bypass on the Hume Highway, the Woomargama Bypass on the Hume Highway or indeed the Western Highway at Anthony’s Cutting, which is due to commence construction next week? We have it there. They say they will make cuts. They need to come clean about where those cuts will be. We on this side of the House regard infrastructure as an investment for the future good of our economy.

Workplace Relations

Mr ABBOTT (3.06 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his statement to this parliament on 20 August 2008, when he said:

No working families in this country will be worse off as a consequence of the industrial relations laws that we have advanced here in this parliament …

I also refer the Prime Minister to his interview with Neil Mitchell last Friday, where he said:

I’m not going to be in a position now nor were we then to say that in each individual circumstance there won’t be some variation. You can’t do that.

My question to the Prime Minister is: can he explain how this is not a blatant broken promise? Can he justify what appears to be, on the face of it, a clear misleading of this parliament?

Mr RUDD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Firstly, the statement to which he refers was given on 20 March last year, not 20 August as he suggests. Secondly, the statement is as follows—

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr RUDD—Well, it is, but you may be referring to a separate statement. The statement which the honourable member I think refers to is as follows:

No working families in this country will be worse off as a consequence of the industrial relations laws that we have advanced here in this parliament …

As the honourable member will know on any honest reflection, that refers to the transitional legislation which was before the House then.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—Those opposite will know that is exactly the legislation which was before the House at the time. The trickiness
suggested by those opposite lies in the Leader of the Opposition conflating that piece of legislation with the Fair Work Bill, which came in later. That is what the Leader of the Opposition has done deliberately in this House. He puts himself up as a straight talker, but, when you dig beneath what he says, he had one position on emissions trading last year but has a new position this year, and he had one position on a Commonwealth takeover of hospitals a few years ago but has a different and reverse position now. What the Leader of the Opposition, the straight talker from central casting, now seeks to do is to conflate the debate in the House at the time on the transitional legislation which the industrial relations minister had before the House at the time and the Fair Work Bill, which was considered later.

The legislation to which the honourable member refers was the transitional legislation which ensured that every worker on an AWA would have the option of remaining on their existing AWA arrangements. We also introduced a no disadvantage test for new arrangements. Together, these provisions ensured that no worker would be made worse off as a result of the transitional arrangements. That was the debate at the time, and the Leader of the Opposition would know that full well. Therefore, that is the position we put to the Australian public at the time.

Secondly, the honourable member may also be interested in what we have said in relation to the Fair Work Act and the commitments we gave to the Australian people at the time. What we said when we introduced these changes to our industrial laws, Forward with Fairness, was as follows:

Labor will get the balance right by introducing a fairer and more flexible industrial relations system with sensible transitional arrangements from Mr Howard’s Work Choices laws.

That is what we did. The honourable member may also be seeking to refer to the impact of awards. I am not sure whether that is within the scope of his question, but can I just say to the honourable member that our position in that respect is absolutely clear-cut and consistent with the past as well.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr Rudd—The honourable member goes to this question about who is being forthright in this place. What he has done today is deliberately take a debate which related to the transitional arrangements in the House at the time—he knows that—and roll it forward to a subsequent consideration by the House of the Fair Work Act. Hence the clever caveat of his question: ‘It appears that a misleading of the House has occurred.’ No such misleading of the House has occurred. In fact, the misleading is contained within the question just asked by the Leader of the Opposition, and he knows it full well.

Prime Minister

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.10 pm)—I seek leave to move a motion of censure against the Prime Minister.

Leave not granted.

Mr Abbott—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Warringah moving the following motion forthwith: That this House censures the Prime Minister for dishonouring the solemn pledges he made to the Australian people and for now walking away from those promises after being forced to admit he can’t keep them and they should never have been made in the first place, and:

(1) in particular for promising:

(a) in this House that no working family would be worse off as a consequence of the Government’s industrial relations
law changes when day by day, we have examples of workers losing pay at a time when the cost of living is increasing;

(b) to fix public hospitals, or take them over, and having done neither, by now walking away from his promise to give the Australian people more say in how their health system is run;

(c) to help everyday Australians cope with rising costs of living yet failing to help families and pensioners manage increasingly tight household budgets including the failure of his flawed FuelWatch and GroceryChoice schemes;

(d) to do something about homelessness and indigenous housing when after two years, communities are still in crisis; and

(e) to leave the superannuation system alone, in his own words, “no change to the superannuation laws, one jot, one tittle”, before then ripping $4 billion out of superannuation and slashing the Superannuation Co-contribution Scheme for low and middle income earners; but

(2) most of all:

(a) for trying to obscure the truth behind many of his Government’s policies with a wall of incomprehensive words and an army of spin-doctors when all the Australian people want is simple, straightforward answers about the issues that affect them and a real plan to pay off debt, safeguard the economy, protect jobs and take this country forward.

What we have seen today is a Prime Minister who is deceptive, a Prime Minister who is weak and a Prime Minister who, above all else, is tricky with the Australian public. On three important issues, we have tried to bring this Prime Minister and this government to account in the House today. First of all, we have tried to bring the Prime Minister to account on his broken promise to fix the public hospital system by the middle of 2009 and, if it is not fixed, to take over the public hospital system. Of all the commitments that this Prime Minister made prior to the last election, I believe this was the most significant. The Australian people know that the state Labor governments have been mismanaging public hospitals for years and years. This Prime Minister was going to be different. He came before the Australian public and said, ‘I’m going to fix this.’ Remember? He said, ‘The buck will stop with me, and, if the states have not fixed the problem by the middle of 2009, I’m going to take them over.’

Well, that was 2007; 2009 has come and gone; 2010 is well and truly here. What did we have the Australian Prime Minister tell the Australian people in this parliament today? Isn’t he a brave man! Isn’t he a man for decisive action! He said, ‘We’ll seek to achieve a compromise with the states.’ Here he is, ‘Courageous Kevin’, the man who was going to take the public hospital system over. What does he say today? He does not offer us a takeover; he offers us a decision-making framework. Here he is, the lifelong bureaucrat, addicted to process, committees, reviews and liaison—this is the stuff of his life. He told us today that, yes, there will be a bold plan, but after the states and territories have reached their decision. He wants to be bold; it is just that the states and territories are holding him back. This is a man who cannot do anything without the agreement of the states and territories—and the public are absolutely sick of it.

Then, of course, we had the superannuation promise—not one jot, not one tittle of change will be made to the superannuation system. We know that $4 billion was ripped out, we know that the co-contribution scheme was drastically changed in the last budget. What does big brave Kevin say on radio last Friday? He says, ‘Oh, just a bit of finetuning.’ You know, something is hovering over this Prime Minister: core promises. This is a man who is dishonest with the Aus-
tralian people, and now he is slipping and sliding and twisting and turning, engaging in sneaky word games to try and get out of the responsibility that he has for breaking the solemn pledges that he has made to the Australian people.

Of all the things that the Australian public are concerned about, of all the things that working families are concerned about, there is nothing so much as their take-home pay. There is nothing so important to the working families of this country as the take-home pay of their breadwinners. This is a prime minister who stood up and said time and time again that nothing that the government does will hurt the take-home pay of Australian workers. He said it in parliament; he said it out of parliament. And it was not just him and it was not just in relation to the government’s transitional bill; it was plainly in relation to the government’s substantive bill. I quote the Deputy Prime Minister:

I can certainly guarantee that there’s nothing in the operations of Labor’s system that is going to make people worse off.

And didn’t she get nailed by Laurie Oakes on Sunday! Wasn’t that the toughest interview and didn’t you see, Mr Speaker, all of a sudden the wind knocked right out of her sails? She knows that she and the Prime Minister are guilty of a gross deception against the Australian people.

Let us just run through it. You have got hospitality workers in many states, not exactly rich people earning $150,000 a year in the eyes of the government; these are people who are lucky to earn $20 an hour, and in some states they going to be $3 an hour worse off as a result of this government’s changes, as a result of this government’s broken promise. We heard a lot of posturing from the Minister for Health and Ageing and from the Prime Minister today about the alleged wrongs of the former government.

Who are just about the hardest working people and most decent and honourable people in our community but nurses, particularly nurses in aged care, and those aged care nurses are going to be up to $300 a week worse off as a result of this government’s changes. It is a flagrant breach of the government’s promise. Members opposite like to talk about Work Choices. The nurses union says that the government’s scheme is worse than Work Choices, and it is. We would never have ripped $300 a week out of the wages of the good, honest working people of this country.

The Prime Minister has plainly misled the parliament by claiming that no-one is going to be worse off under his scheme when plainly people are very, very much worse off under his scheme. Let me just say this. The most solemn principle that must be adhered to by members of this place is: do not mislead this parliament. I quote the Prime Minister himself:

Trust in any democracy is a fragile thing, and trust is based on truth. If you fracture truth, you fracture the trust upon which it is based. That is the Prime Minister himself. He has failed his own test, and he deserves to be censured.

(Time expired)

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (3.20 pm)—I second the motion. In a press conference on 29 February 2008 the Prime Minister said:

Trust is the key currency of politics and unless you can be trusted to honour that which you’ve
committed to do then I’ve got to say, you’re not going to obtain the enduring respect of the Australian people.

In front of the most sacred building in this capital, the Australian War Memorial, the Prime Minister said on 17 March 2008: ... we will honour all of our pre-election commitments. Every one of them, every one of them.

The Prime Minister is right: there is a measure of trust between Australian representatives in this place and the Australian people. What has now become perfectly evident to everyday Australians is that this Prime Minister has broken that bond of trust. This Prime Minister made a commitment to the Australian people that he would fix the hospital system by the middle of 2009 and that, if he did not deliver, he would hold a referendum to take over the hospitals from the states. This Prime Minister made a commitment that working families in Australia would not be worse off as a result of his new workplace laws, yet each day evidence comes out that they are worse off. This Prime Minister made a commitment to the Australian people that they would have cheaper household goods, that they would have cheaper fuel and that he would do that by setting up websites and a range of other initiatives. Groceries are more expensive, electricity is more expensive, water is more expensive, gas is more expensive, education is more expensive, going to hospital is more expensive and medical costs for Australian families are more expensive. Yet this Prime Minister asks for trust! He asked the Australian people. He asked the educators, the health carers, the patients and the students to trust him that he would keep his promises. Even on Friday on Melbourne radio the Prime Minister tried to justify a broken promise—$4 billion. It was finetuning in the same league as the honesty of Fine Cotton—$4 billion. When the Prime Minister was asked, ‘What’s the difference between substantive and minor?’ the Prime Minister said, hand on heart:

Substantive goes to the entire system, as opposed to let’s call it finetuning at the edges ...

These things affect people fundamentally. That’s why Neil you have got to be absolutely straight up and down with people about what you are going to do and then take it to the Australian people if you are going to make any substantive changes.

As I’ve said, I’m not prejudging what is the independent review— we have no idea what he is talking about now— because I haven’t worked my way through that. But if we make any decisions in that respect it’ll be subject to full scrutiny and people will make up their mind one way or the other.

That’s a new definition of ‘finetuning’. Sadly, it is a definition of ‘broken promise’. It is about breach of trust. It is a definition that this Prime Minister has set for himself, along with his own benchmark, that illustrates the fact that the Prime Minister has misled the Australian people. He has broken that sacred bond of trust which he asked the Australian people for in 2007 and which he pretended to honour in 2008. But, in 2009-10, we know this Prime Minister cannot be trusted. If the Prime Minister cannot keep his 2007 election commitments, how can Australians expect him to keep his promises in 2010? How can they expect to trust a Prime Minister who breaks his word, who enjoins the notion of trust? How can they expect that Prime Minister to solemnly look the Australian people in the eye and honour commitments made in 2010, when, as each day passes, Australians are suffering the impact of broken promises?

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (3.25 pm)—What is really interesting for the
nation about this motion is that it comes on the day when the member for Wentworth stood to his feet and belled the cat on climate change policy. What this is about, with the pre-prepared speeches by those opposite, is making sure that they can fill the time, fill the space, and make sure there is no focus on the fact that two months ago they stood rock solid behind the then Leader of the Opposition on the approach to climate change.

Today is all about one thing: distraction with a capital ‘D’, because the former Leader of the Opposition stood to his feet and said unequivocally why the coalition had supported an emissions trading scheme. He said unequivocally that the alternative scheme would be a fiscal disaster. So what we have here is a simple parliamentary tactic, a parliamentary device, to take the attention away from climate change. Interestingly, the last several questions during question slid away from the topic that they have held to be so fundamentally important over this last week or so and which now has been relegated to the margins because the member for Wentworth belled the cat and exposed the Leader of the Opposition for what he is. The Leader of the Opposition’s baseline position is, ‘Climate change is absolute crap.’ Then he went on to say, ‘Well, the government has a mandate to act on an emissions trading scheme.’ That was his second position. His third position was, ‘If they accept the opposition’s amendments, then we will support the emissions trading scheme.’ His fourth position on emissions trading and climate was as follows: ‘We should oppose it.’ That was his view. In fact what he said, once he got to the eve of the Liberal Party election ballot, was, ‘I’m fundamentally opposed to action on climate change.’

Here is a very interesting further twist: when he has been asked since then about the change from December to January or from November to December in his support for an emissions trading scheme, the Leader of the Opposition has gone around saying, ‘Well, things changed at Copenhagen.’ There is a little problem with that, Tony: Copenhagen happened two weeks after you announced your change in policy. There is a little sequencing problem there. What in fact you sought to do was grasp the politics of the internal battle within your party and wrest the leadership from the member for Wentworth, the former Leader of the Opposition. That is what it was all about. In fact, when asked on 1 December by a journalist why he was changing suddenly, for the fifth time, his position on climate change, the ‘straight talk Tony’ response was: ‘Oh, Mate, the politics have changed. They’ve changed big time.’ So, ‘Captain Principle’, ‘Captain Consistent’, the straight-talking Leader of the Opposition, with five different positions on climate change, having gone to the previous election with hand on heart, supporting the introduction of an emissions trading scheme, then seeks to tell us he has changed posture because of Copenhagen while having in fact announced that change in posture two weeks before Copenhagen was convened.

That is because the Leader of the Opposition just makes it up as he goes along. Every single thing he makes up as he goes along. Whether it is the matter he raised in his motion moved just before about the future of the hospital system—the stentorian Tony Abbott as health minister telling the nation three years ago that he was going to take over the hospital system. That is what he thought the future should be. Then he gets to the first question asked about the future of the hospital system when he became the Leader of the Opposition and he says, ‘I didn’t mean that.’ In Battlelines, where he is supposed to have given his real, heartfelt position, what does he say? He says on the future of the emissions trading scheme that he ‘backed the then government’s view because it was the most
cost-effective approach’. That was supposed to be Tony Abbott unbottled. That was supposed to be Tony Abbott uncapped. That was supposed to be Tony Abbott telling like it is—except, once again, it just changed, as each position changes along the way.

What is fascinating about today’s debate, in particular in terms of its dimensions on health and hospitals, is that it comes back to the Leader of the Opposition getting to his feet and speaking about integrity on health and hospitals. I have a few words that I think the nation may remember, which came from the Leader of the Opposition when he was health minister of Australia for four years. He said to the Australian people he would provide a ‘rock-solid guarantee’. What was that rock-solid, ironclad guarantee about? Was it about the Medicare safety net? Was this minister responsible for it? I think he was. Regarding the integrity of the Leader of the Opposition against the benchmark he just sought to advance, which is to honour your commitments to the Australian people, he said to everyone prior to the election that they had from him a ‘rock-solid, ironclad guarantee’ as far as the future of the Medicare safety net went, and what did he do? As soon as the election was held, as the minister responsible, the health minister of Australia, he welshed on it. That goes to the absolute core of the integrity of the argument being advanced by the Leader of the Opposition.

Can I also add this: he stands at the dispatch box and talks about integrity as it relates to the health system when, as health minister of Australia, he ripped $1 billion from the public hospitals of Australia. He goes also to the question of the government’s record of achievement in health and hospitals—one billion dollars ripped out by the Leader of the Opposition and a 50 per cent increase in funding to hospitals under this government. Secondly, under this government 125 hospitals have received new elective surgery equipment and operating theatres in just two years.

Opposition member interjecting—

Mr RUDD—He interjects: ‘That didn’t make much of a difference.’ The Leader of the Opposition would be interested to know that it made a difference to 62,000 elective surgery procedures, which, as health minister of Australia ripping a billion dollars out of the system, he sought simply to undermine. Thirdly, 37 hospitals are receiving upgrades to their emergency departments. Of course, the Leader of the Opposition’s record on direct funding to emergency departments was zero as health minister—not one brass razoo, not a single dollar either to emergency departments or to elective surgery.

Then there is $3.17 billion for 36 major health infrastructure projects. This is the first government in Australian history to directly invest in the capital that is the building needs of the public hospital system of Australia. What did he say for four years as health minister of Australia? He said: ‘That’s not my problem. It’s the states’ problem.’ What we have done, for the first time, is invest directly in our hospitals. That is why we are investing $100 million into the future development of the Nepean Hospital. That is why we are going to make investments like that elsewhere in the country as well.

He asked about achievement and honouring our commitments to improve health outcomes for the Australian people. Five hundred and sixty thousand teenagers have received a check-up under the Medicare Teen Dental Plan, which did not exist when he was health minister. It was brought in by us, and half a million kids, often from lower income profiles, are getting a dental check-up which they would otherwise not have got.

The Leader of the Opposition sat on his hands and did nothing about the chronic shortage of nursing places in Australia.
Therefore, under this government in its first year of operation, 2009, universities offered an additional 1,094 undergraduate nursing places. When he was health minister, this man froze GP training places. How could he do that against the health needs of the nation? Since coming into office we have increased GP training places by 75 in 2009 alone. A further achievement—and they often guffaw about as if there is something remarkable about it—is the implementation of the GP Super Clinics program across the country. We are funding 36 of them across the country. How many did they fund? Zero. Funding agreements underpin 28 of them, and a number are already operating, compared to a record of zero on the part of those opposite. Aged care places have increased by nearly 10,000. Six hundred and sixty-two transitional care places have been delivered to help nearly 5,000 older Australians, and the Leader of the Opposition gets to his feet and says, ‘Where is your integrity on the question of health and hospitals?’

I say to him that in two years alone we have achieved more by way of investments into the system than he achieved in 12 years in the previous government. That is the basic comparator, which is why I said to him earlier today that we welcome fundamentally this debate on health and hospitals. And let us never forget that as a member of the government he axed the Commonwealth dental program, with 650,000 Australians on public dental waiting lists.

I go back to where this debate began. Why have they brought it on today all of a flush and all of a hurry? Because of their fear of the member for Wentworth being on television tonight. We know what the member for Wentworth had to say earlier in his general character reference concerning the Leader of the Opposition. His reference to the Leader of the Opposition and the policy he was putting forth in terms of climate change was this:

Any policy that is announced will simply be a con, an environmental fig leaf to cover a determination to do nothing.

That is what the member for Wentworth, Malcolm Turnbull, said about Tony Abbott. I think the Australian people spot this for what it is. (Time expired)

Question put:

That the motion (Mr Abbott’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [3.39 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes……….. 61

Noes……….. 78

Majority………. 17

AYES

Question negatived.

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

WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.44 pm)—Mr Speaker, with your indulgence I wish briefly to correct the record. In my last question to the Prime Minister I referred to a statement on 20 August 2008. I should have said 20 March 2008. I am sorry about that.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.44 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The Speaker—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr Abbott—Most grievously, on two occasions in question time today.

The Speaker—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw the last remark.

Mr Abbott—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Mr Laming (Bowman) (3.46 pm)—I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

The Speaker—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr Laming—Yes, I do.

The Speaker—Please proceed.

Mr Abbott—On the first occasion I was misrepresented by the Prime Minister who said repeatedly in question time today that I had (1) ripped money out of the public hospital system, (2) failed to increase GP training places and (3) failed to increase nurse training places. All three of these are absolute and total untruths. The second matter of misrepresentation was when the Treasurer in answering a question today claimed that I and indeed everyone on this side of the House had voted against the guarantee legislation. That is absolutely wrong. We supported it and he should not tell lies.

The Speaker—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw the last remark.

Mr Abbott—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Mr Laming (Bowman) (3.46 pm)—I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

The Speaker—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr Laming—Yes, I do.
cept the current program. I actually compli-
mented the Minister for Immigration and
Citizenship on reviewing this area and I
think it is completely wrong to infer that I
made any comment against skilled migra-
tion.

The SPEAKER—Whilst the member did
not debate the personal explanation, he did
not quite explain who uttered the misrepre-
sentation, but I think we got the message.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
Economy

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (3.46
pm)—by leave—I make a ministerial state-
ment relating to the exit from the govern-
ment’s guarantee of large deposits and
wholesale funding. On several occasions
now since this government took office, I
have updated the House on Australia’s path
through the worst global recession in 75
years. Through March and June 2008, I
warned of the deteriorating global outlook,
and advised that much of the impact on the
real economy was yet to be felt. In Septem-
ber 2008, I said I was confident that, through
the hard work and unity of all Australians,
we would come through these challenges in a
position of strength and ready to tackle our
future.

I am sure all the honourable members of
this House were pleased to see the IMF, just
two weeks ago, endorse again Australia’s
standout economic performance among the
developed world during the global recession.
We are virtually alone amongst advanced
economies in avoiding recession. That is
why I believe that Australians have good
reason to be confident, but of course not complacent, about our economic prospects.
And it is against this improving economic
landscape that I would like to update hon-
ourable members, and through them the Aus-
tralian people, on a very significant devel-

Honourable members will know, as Governor Stevens stated at the time, that the answer to this question was of course yes. Our banks are highly rated, well capitalised and did not engage in the risky lending seen in some countries. But, as Governor Stevens told us, actions like those taken by the Australian government maintained ‘public confidence in the security of the banking system’. And honourable members will know that, despite the resilience of our banks, they still compete in global credit markets for funding against other borrowers all around the world.

There was a period in late 2008 where our banks experienced great difficulty in borrowing offshore, and this threatened the flow of credit to the entire Australian economy. Where Australian banks were able to borrow at all, the cost had skyrocketed since the onset of the global financial crisis. In mid-2007, before the crisis, our banks were able to issue five-year wholesale funding for as cheap as 35 basis points over the benchmark rate. By late 2008, at the peak of the crisis, this had blown out by a multiple of five times—to 175 basis points over the benchmark rate. Our G20 colleagues started introducing bank guarantees to support international borrowing by their banks. So the Australian government acted quickly and decisively to ensure our banks stayed on a level playing field. On 12 October 2008, the government announced the guarantee of all deposits and wholesale funding. This was just one in a suite of actions that we took to protect Australia against the worst the world could throw at us.

The Rudd government provided three critical waves of fiscal stimulus to boost demand, keep businesses ticking over and support employment. As a result, Australia has been virtually alone among advanced economies in avoiding recession. Australia now has lower debt and deficits than comparable countries, we have maintained our AAA rating, and we have the second lowest unemployment of the major advanced economies. So it is unsurprising, with everything else we are doing to support jobs and growth, that the community has not focused as much on the importance of the guarantee in keeping our economy moving forward.

But the government’s guarantee of wholesale funding was indeed central to Australia’s crisis response. It gave our banks continued access to global capital markets on competitive terms, allowing them to raise more than $160 billion. This meant they could keep lending to Australian businesses and households, providing vital support for jobs and growth. And the Financial Claims Scheme will keep giving over 16 million Australians certainty over their deposits.

In fact, we had Governor Stevens say in early 2009 that actions like those of the Australian government ‘helped to stabilise what could have been a catastrophic loss of confidence in the global financial system’. In the governor’s words, he thought ‘what was done stabilised a potentially quite dangerous situation’. Governor Stevens said that these measures saw ‘term spreads in money markets decline’ from their peak, and ‘long-term markets reopen to banks’. And the IMF told us the guarantee has been critical in supporting the flow of credit through the Australian economy. It allowed our banks last year to issue bonds in larger amounts, with longer maturities and at lower cost, than had been possible since mid-2007.

But of course, the guarantee was put in place to support the Australian people—not the banks. Australian banks and other lenders have so far paid around $1.1 billion to the taxpayer for the use of the guarantee and will pay around $5.5 billion over its full life. And without the guarantee, our banks would have lent less and interest rates for borrowers would have been higher. This would have led
directly to lower growth and more households losing a breadwinner right across Australia.

The government has always said the guarantee would be withdrawn ‘once market conditions have normalised’. We put in place ‘very strong real-time monitoring arrangements’ through the Council of Financial Regulators. Our regulators have constantly monitored international developments, evolving market conditions, and the financial position of all Australian ADIs. The council advised the government late last year that it was coming to the view that conditions may warrant removal of the guarantee. After further assessments, the council recommended we close the guarantee to new issuance as at 31 March this year. The council considered that bank funding conditions had improved such that the guarantee is no longer needed. This reflects the prudential strength of our individual ADIs and the strength of our whole financial system. The council has advised that none of these institutions would need the guarantee to fund themselves. In fact, the proportion of non-guaranteed issuance by Australian banks has increased from less than two per cent at the start of 2009 to 98 per cent in January 2010.

As I said yesterday, I have been discussing the future of the guarantee with the council for some time. And I have been talking to the council about market conditions through the whole period of the guarantee, since October 2008. The council’s recommendation has not changed in light of the recent anxiety in some global markets. And critically, our regulators have explicitly advised that removing the guarantee will not materially affect banking sector funding costs. So I make this point very clearly—there will be absolutely no justification for any bank to raise interest rates beyond future Reserve Bank movements, for any reason at all, including the removal of the guarantee. As I have said before, with some banks’ interest margins having recovered to pre-crisis levels, the Australian people will not tolerate any bank trying to take them for a ride.

Finally, the council advised that the Australian guarantee should not be available much longer than other countries’, given the greater strength of our financial system compared to many of them. Key G20 countries, including the United States, Canada, France and Korea have withdrawn their wholesale funding guarantees. The UK and Germany will do so shortly. So just as our stimulus is being progressively withdrawn, it is appropriate we now move to start unwinding our guarantees.

Honourable members will know that the government has also announced the withdrawal of the Guarantee of State and Territory Borrowing on 31 December 2010. In July last year, I announced the formal commencement of the state guarantee. I said then that the global recession has ‘severely constricted liquidity in state government bond markets’, and that ‘supporting liquidity in these markets is critical to maintaining the capacity of state and territory governments to deliver on nation-building investments’. The government’s announcement led to a sharp improvement in the pricing of state bonds relative to Commonwealth bonds and restored demand for state government bonds. These benefits were experienced by all states, regardless of whether they opted to make explicit use of the guarantee.

The state guarantee scheme was also established as an interim measure to be withdrawn when market conditions normalised. However, a longer transition period relative to the guarantee of large deposits and wholesale funding is required for states to establish liquidity in new unguaranteed bond lines. Unlike bank funding, issuing bonds under such existing lines is a critical source of
funding for the states. All states and territories will therefore continue to have access to the guarantee until 31 December 2010.

Withdrawing the guarantee of large deposits and wholesale funding represents a significant milestone for Australia’s banking system in pushing past the worst of the financial crisis. But it is appropriate to not only take stock of the resilience of our financial system, but to also reflect on some of the challenges forced on us by the global economic carnage we have withstood. The stability of Australia’s banking system has been recognised consistently by both the IMF and the OECD. But as I said earlier, we were not immune from the impacts of the financial crisis—it created significant challenges for competition in our domestic banking market.

The guarantee has been critical in helping to support competition. It offered wholesale funding certainty to more than 150 Australian ADIs, including regional banks, building societies and credit unions. It has allowed non-major Australian banks to raise over $32 billion in funding from international credit markets. We know that we cannot undo all the impacts of the global financial crisis, but we are working hard to support banking competition.

Honourable members may be aware that the securitisation market was one of the strongest drivers of competition in the mortgage market in the decade before the crisis. So on 30 November last year, I directed the Australian Office of Financial Management to invest another $8 billion in high-quality, AAA rated Australian residential mortgage backed securities to further support competition in Australia’s mortgage market. This was in addition to the Rudd government’s initial $8 billion investment, which we launched in 2008.

The government’s direct investment of up to $16 billion in the RMBS market has enabled smaller lenders to lend at competitive interest rates and maintain a higher level of lending than would otherwise have been possible. It has also been critical to preserving market infrastructure and fostering a recovery in private investor confidence. And just over a week ago, I announced a fresh boost to competition with three non-bank lenders and two smaller banks allocated up to $3.4 billion in funding, from our second $8 billion RMBS investment. It is expected that private investors will also participate significantly in these offerings, following recent encouraging signs of improvement in securitisation markets.

As I said a week ago, private capital has now made up some 37 per cent—or $4.6 billion—of the $12.4 billion in Australian RMBS issuance in which the AOFM has taken a stake since the government’s initial announcement in September 2008. This will place more competition on the big banks, helping to put downward pressure on mortgage rates over time. The Rudd government have acted decisively to support banking competition, but we know we simply cannot overcome all of the effects of the global financial crisis overnight.

We understand that mortgage repayments are a big part of the monthly budget for most Australian families. We will keep looking for ways to make it easier for families, at kitchen tables around Australia, to balance the household budget. For starters, we have introduced tough new consumer credit protection laws, due to come into force this year. These new laws will be the toughest laws governing consumer credit Australia has ever had, with wide-ranging powers to overrule unfair terms in credit contracts, including mortgages. And we will always make sure the independent competition regulator, the ACCC, is armed with the powers it needs to prevent anti-competitive behaviour by the banks. Finally, we will continue to promote
Australia’s future as a leading financial services hub—we want to get the settings right to encourage new competitors into our local banking sector. Now more than ever Australia is the investment destination of choice, offering among the most robust financial, physical and regulatory infrastructure globally. The clear objective of the Rudd government is to position Australia to leverage the global economic recovery by preserving this reputation.

I would like to also take this opportunity to briefly discuss the global regulatory landscape for the banking sector. As honourable members know, there were some fundamental problems with key aspects of financial market regulation, particularly in other countries. These led to excessive risk taking across global financial markets. That is why Australia has committed to working through the G20 and the Financial Stability Board to address the underlying weaknesses in the global regulatory system.

We have to ensure that global financial markets contribute to sustainable global growth and not to the types of destabilising behaviour we have seen in recent years. Of course, this will mean a substantial adjustment for some financial systems and institutions, particularly in the developed world. We recognise the need to work with our G20 colleagues to create a consistent international set of principles for regulation of our increasingly interconnected global financial system.

It is important that financial institutions not be able to simply ‘go shopping’ for the easiest set of financial regulations. But, of course, Australia’s financial system did not suffer the same excesses as seen elsewhere. So our financial system is not expected to need to go through the same degree of adjustment. To this end, APRA, the Reserve Bank and the Treasury are working through the G20 to ensure any financial reform arrangements are appropriate for Australia and reflect the resilience of our system. The key here is better regulation rather than more regulation.

But I will say this to the banks: the Australian people will not tolerate any bank abusing their place in the Australian economy because of their strength. The Rudd government is working to ensure Australia continues to have a stable, efficient and competitive financial sector which will continue to serve our broader economy and the Australian people.

Australia’s financial system stands today as the envy of the world. This reflects both the hard work and experience of our regulators and the decisive action of the Rudd government. The government took swift action to ensure our banks’ access to global capital markets, to support RMBS funding for smaller lenders and to provide certainty for depositors across Australia. This ensured the continued flow of credit and, together with the government’s timely and targeted stimulus, helped infuse a sense of confidence in the Australian people. Australians worked together like they have always done—businesses and employees, governments and households—driving our economy to outperform all other major advanced economies around the world. I thank the House.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for North Sydney to speak for 16 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr SWAN—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Hockey speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 16 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney (4.04 pm)—The introduction of the bank guarantees was a necessary step to preserve confi-
idence in the Australian financial system during the global financial crisis. Let us be very clear: there were two bank guarantees: firstly, the guarantee of wholesale raisings was announced in October 2008 and took effect one month later. It was provided for a fee and was introduced primarily to preserve the ability of Australian deposit-taking institutions to raise funds in the international capital markets. About $166 billion of taxpayer guaranteed funds were raised by banks up to the end of December. Non-major Australian banks raised over $32 billion from international markets, as the Treasurer outlined in his press release. What the Treasurer did not tell you was that $134 billion was raised by the four major banks: ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, NAB and Westpac. The government has received $1.1 billion in fees and will receive a total of $5.5 billion over the full life of the guarantee.

The coalition does not as a general principle support government interference in markets unless there is clear evidence of market failure. It supported the introduction of the wholesale guarantee as a temporary measure to ensure Australian banks had a level playing field in competing with banks offshore for funds. The Treasurer constantly says in this place that we opposed it. In fact, the records show that we supported it. I seek leave to table the Votes and Proceedings, No. 63, of the House of Representatives of Tuesday, 25 November 2008, which states quite clearly that the question was put and passed and that the bill was read a second time.

Leave not granted.

Mr HOCKEY—That was a trivial response. The coalition notes that other key developed countries have withdrawn or announced a withdrawal of their wholesale funding guarantees. I also know that Australian banks are now able to readily access offshore markets for funds without the use of the guarantee. On these grounds the coalition supports the decision to terminate the wholesale bank guarantee, effective 31 March. However, I would ask the Treasurer to ensure that there is no last-minute rush by banks to gorge themselves on the government guarantee before the deadline. The use of the guarantee by the banks is a contingent liability of the Commonwealth. I expect the Treasurer will fully outline that in the upcoming budget. The Australian people should be very wary of any increase in liabilities, on balance sheet or contingent, beyond the bare minimum. I also note the comments today by David Liddy, the Chief Executive Officer of the Bank of Queensland, and by a number of other smaller institutions worried that they will not be able to raise money at an affordable rate, and those concerns need to be addressed by the Treasurer.

The second guarantee was a retail deposit guarantee, which was introduced in November 2008 for a period of three years. It has a natural end date, of course, of November 2011. The retail deposit guarantee was introduced to preserve retail depositor confidence in all regulated ADIs. The coalition did not support an uncapped scheme and suggested that it should be capped at $100,000. We remember the complete mess the government created with its introduction of an uncapped guarantee. Then it changed to the cap and created distortions for a number of other financial institutions, cash management trusts and mortgage trusts. It created confusion amongst the general public. We specifically said before it was introduced that it should introduce a cap of $100,000. The government introduced an unlimited cap, completely screwed the market and then pulled it back to a deposit for a million dollars. Even now there are some areas where people are completely confused about whether a deposit has an uncapped guarantee, a guarantee or
whether part of the funds are guaranteed or not.

I want to come to responsibilities of the banks. It would have been fair and reasonable for the Australian government to have requested something in addition to a fee in return for the support granted by taxpayers to the authorised deposit-taking institutions. After all, the provision of the guarantee was one of the reasons, but obviously not the key reason, we were able to outperform many of our Northern Hemisphere counterparts. I ask the House to bear in mind that I was the minister that introduced a whole lot of financial reform, which the Treasurer naturally enough does not want to talk about but which helped to get us through the most difficult times in the financial services sector. I note that the Treasurer has called on the banks to behave as good corporate citizens. Every time the term ‘bank’ is mentioned, you can rest assured the Treasurer will say, ‘We’re giving them a warning not to act inappropriately.’ He tends to do that, to overplay, and he tends to have stern words that unfortunately fall on deaf ears.

Loan spreads have widened. In April 2009 the Reserve Bank cut the cash rate by 25 basis points, but banks reduced the standard interest rate on variable mortgages by only 10 basis points. And what did the Treasurer say? He noted in media interviews on 8 April and again on 21 April that he was ‘pretty disappointed’ with the banks’ actions and, ‘They do need a good kick up the bum occasionally.’ The Prime Minister is not happy with it. He asked them to reconsider and said that the government has made it very clear that it wants to see a full pass-through of cash rate decreases. Strike 1: the wrath of the Treasurer in April 2009 was meaningless.

In June 2009 there was no change in the RBA cash rate and yet banks, on average, lifted the standard variable rate by five basis points. The Treasurer said in the media at that time that the decision gets in the way of rate relief—‘Australians will be rightly furious; I think this is a very selfish decision,’ and, ‘It is so disappointing to see this decision. I think it is a very selfish decision.’ Strike 2: the Treasurer gave further interviews in October and November, saying that they would be no justification for banks to increase their mortgage rates over and above the increase in the cash rate, yet one month later, in December 2009, the Reserve Bank increased the cash rate by 25 basis points and the banks responded by lifting the standard variable mortgage rate by 35 basis points. Strike 3: the Treasurer says:

…there was no justification for—banks—to move their rates above the official interest rate rise.

Again, stern words from the Treasurer. He echoed them again in late January as a result of the banks’ actions. Despite the Treasurer’s rhetoric, since March 2009, the spread or difference between the cash rate and the banks’ standard variable mortgage rate has widened by 30 basis points. I note the Treasurer’s statement today:

…there will be absolutely no justification … for any bank to raise interest rates beyond any Reserve Bank movements.

I refer to his stern, decisive comments yesterday that the banks would ‘incur the wrath not just of the Australian people but’—oh, my God—‘of the Australian government’, the same wrath that the banks had received over all those months. They completely defied the Treasurer and $135 billion later the banks are saying to this government, ‘Stick it in your purse and run away.’ And what effect is that having on the Australian people? The Reserve Bank stated in its last statement that one of the key reasons it was not moving on the cash rate was that the banks had already
increased the flow-through to mortgage holders. In effect, the Reserve Bank was saying, ‘It doesn’t matter what we do, the banks themselves are charging more for mortgages.’ Somehow, in this place, the Treasurer came in and claimed that it was a great win for Australians with mortgages—such a great win for Australian mortgages that the Reserve Bank did not increase the cash rate. In fact, with $134 billion of taxpayer guaranteed money over the last few months, the banks themselves had increased interest rates by nearly one per cent when the Reserve Bank had only gone with 0.75 per cent. So it seems that the banks have thanked the Australian public for their support by lifting interest rates by more than the Reserve Bank and by tightening access to credit. That seems hardly a fair deal.

The Treasurer also announced that the guarantee of state and territory borrowings will be withdrawn on 31 December 2010. This guarantee was introduced on 24 July 2009 and provided the states with the right to use the federal government AAA rating to enhance the quality of their bond offerings and to facilitate their ability to raise funds in the capital market. I note that there are some states already with a AAA rating. To be fair to the Treasurer, bond markets do price AAAs differently. Obviously some of the states were struggling to get their bond issuance away. But the coalition overall has supported the introduction of a guarantee of state debt, provided that an appropriate fee is charged. Also, significantly, given that a difference in credit ratings results in a different charge applied to each state, it is important to note that there should be no financial incentive for the states to use the AAA rating to engage in some form of arbitrage that will work to the disadvantage of taxpayers overall. I note there is a long lead time until the withdrawal of the government guarantee of state government debt until December this year. Again, I would ask the Treasurer to explain in detail why he gave an undertaking to the states to provide that guarantee until December whereas the banks themselves have until March. It might have something to do with election timing, but that would be a little cynical. Forgive me for being a little cynical about it.

I want to touch on the issue of the register of government debt. Legislation was passed on 18 June 2009 for the creation of a register of holders of government debt. This was to include Commonwealth government debt and state government debt guaranteed by the Commonwealth. This was an amendment moved by the coalition. It is amazing how the government say we have no policy and yet they are actually taking our policy and accepting it as part of the legislation that goes through this place, if you can believe that. This was an amendment moved by the coalition because we believe it is important for Australians to know the identity of our creditors. It is now eight months since it became law and the register has still not been put in place. The Australian public still do not know from whom the government is borrowing money. They still do not know to which countries they are indebted. I call on the government to deliver this. We will be pursuing this in estimates and we want some answers. Why hasn’t the register of government debt been delivered? Why aren’t the agencies complying with the law as it stands to set up a register so that we the Australian people and the Australian taxpayers know exactly who we are borrowing money from every day and every week of the year?

I just want to touch on the economy for a moment because it is all linked, as the Treasurer quite rightly says. With the winding back now of the government guarantee on wholesale funding, together with the Reserve Bank increasing interest rates and the banks themselves increasing interest rates, it is pat-
ently clear that Australia has come through what will be the worst impact of the global financial crisis. The Reserve Bank said that as well in its statements on monetary policy only last week. The fundamental point is that this government is continuing to spend money as if Australia has an unemployment rate of 8½ per cent. Yet Australia’s unemployment rate seems to have stabilised well under six per cent. We welcome the fact that Australia has an unemployment rate of less than six per cent. I was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations who saw it at 4.1 per cent, but do not let that get in the way of a good story.

I want to point out that the government said that it needed to spend so much money in the budget to address Australia’s problems, but that was all based on the fact that Australia was going to have an unemployment rate of 8½ per cent. Australia now clearly has an unemployment rate of less than six per cent, but the government is still spending the same amount of money. In fact, it is spending half a billion dollars on school halls in 2012 to address an economic downturn of 2008. The spending by this government is putting upward pressure on interest rates, it is putting ‘crowding out’ pressure on financial institutions and others that need to borrow money, it is making credit harder to get and it is making it more expensive for small business. We support good initiatives that are based on good policy but we will not go down the path of not criticising bad policy and bad initiatives, which this government has a habit of foisting on the Australian people.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (4.20 pm)—Mr Speaker, I seek to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)—Does the member for Dunkley believe he has been misrepresented?

Mr BILLSON—Horrendously so.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr BILLSON—In question time today in response to my question the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy said that I had admitted that electricity prices would go up under the coalition’s plan. He seems to have been referring to a Courier Mail article of 4 February. There is absolutely no such admission and I would urge the minister to be a little more thoughtful and careful in seeking to attribute such admissions to the opposition.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Burma

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.21 pm)—by leave—I wish to update the House on developments in Burma. On 4 January, Burma’s Independence Day, Burmese Senior General Than Shwe announced that plans were under way to conduct elections in Burma this year. Elections have long been foreshadowed under the Burmese military’s so-called ‘Roadmap to Democracy’. If elections do take place, they will be the first in Burma in 20 years. This year will, therefore, be an important one for Burma and an important one for the international community’s engagement with Burma.

Australia has long been appalled both by the Burmese military’s suppression of the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people and by its disrespect for their human rights. It is worthwhile recalling some important events in this longstanding suppression. A military regime, in some form, has ruled Burma since 1962, nearly 50 years. We recall the bloody put down of the pro-democracy protests in 1988, just over 20 years ago.
Since 1988 Australia has had in place visa restrictions against senior members of the Burmese regime and their associates and supporters.

Following the failure to implement the outcome of the 1990 elections, in 1991 Australia introduced a ban on defence exports to Burma. This is a ban on the export to Burma of controlled goods as listed on the Defence and Strategic Goods List. In October 2007, financial sanctions were introduced in response to the violent crackdown on democracy protesters. These various sanctions—travel sanctions, defence sanctions and financial sanctions—have the common purpose of exerting pressure on Burma’s military regime.

At the same time, Australia has recognised that engaging the Burmese authorities serves important national, regional and international interests. We live in the same region. Through regional forums like the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Bali Process on people smuggling, human trafficking and transnational crime, Australia has had the opportunity to engage Burma on challenges like counternarcotics, trafficking in people, disaster relief and pandemic diseases.

As well, Australia has for many years sought to help the Burmese people through a program of humanitarian assistance targeting the most vulnerable. This program, now worth nearly $30 million in 2009-10, assists with fighting infectious diseases such as avian influenza, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; provides food aid and agricultural expertise to alleviate rural poverty; protects displaced people; and supports children to attend and remain in primary school.

ASEAN, through its humanitarian work in Burma after Cyclone Nargis, has been vital in facilitating assistance from Australia and members of the international community to the Burmese people. Common membership of regional organisations also allows us at ministerial level to directly advocate democratic reform and national reconciliation—as I did, for example, when I met my counterpart Burmese Foreign Minister Win during the ASEAN-related meetings in Thailand last year.

On 12 August last year I addressed the House on Burma after Aung San Suu Kyi’s conviction on spurious charges, leading to her ongoing house arrest. I set out then that Aung San Suu Kyi’s sentence effectively removed the prospect of her participation in any proposed 2010 elections and would detract from the credibility of those elections. Since that time, there have been a number of important developments both within Burma and in the international community’s approach to Burma. On 17 September last year the Burmese authorities released 128 political prisoners in an amnesty. This was a welcome, tentative step in the right direction. Repression, however, continues. On 31 December, 15 activists were sentenced to up to 71 years imprisonment each. There regrettably remain close to 2,000 political prisoners in Burma, including Aung San Suu Kyi herself. Australia again calls on Burma’s authorities to release them and allow them to participate fully and freely in the upcoming elections.

In September 2009, in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, I joined 10 other foreign ministers and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a ministerial level meeting of the Secretary-General’s Group of Friends on Myanmar. The participation in this meeting was evidence both of the international community’s desire to see progress in Burma and of its willingness to both work together and with the Secretary-General towards this end. At the meeting, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon identified three areas for future unity of pur-
pose and action: first, to urge Burma to work with the United Nations to ensure an inclusive process of dialogue and create the conditions for credible elections; second, to uphold the role of the United Nations in Burma; and, third, to signal the international community’s willingness to help the people of Burma, but noting that Burma’s military regime needed to respond to international concerns in order for this to occur.

My visit to New York for the General Assembly coincided with the announcement of the United States policy review on Burma. The United States administration concluded that a sanctions only policy to isolate Burma’s military has not worked and that future US policy would combine engagement, appropriate sanctions and humanitarian assistance. US Secretary of State Clinton said that any debate that pits sanctions against engagement created a false choice, and that the international community would need to employ both of these tools. Australia has welcomed this approach, as has the international community generally.

As to developments within Burma, on 25 September last year Aung San Suu Kyi wrote to Senior General Than Shwe offering to work with the Burmese authorities on the withdrawal of international sanctions, and asking to meet representatives of the European Union, the United States and Australia. The fact that Australia was one of these three is of course significant and reflects Australia’s longstanding interest and friendship of the Burmese people. The Burmese authorities agreed to this request.

On 9 October 2009 Australia’s charge d’affaires, together with the UK ambassador and the US charge d’affaires, met Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon. The meeting was the first opportunity for a substantive discussion between an Australian representative and Aung San Suu Kyi since February 2003. Australia’s charge d’affaires conveyed a message from the Prime Minister which expressed the support of the Australian government and the people of Australia for Aung San Suu Kyi and her struggle for democracy in Burma. This was warmly welcomed by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Australia welcomed the subsequent visit to Burma in early November last year by United States Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and the meetings he held with the Burmese authorities, with Aung San Suu Kyi and with representatives of a number of ethnic minorities. Aung San Suu Kyi wrote further to Senior General Than Shwe on 11 November 2009 requesting contact with her party’s central executive committee. In response to her request, she was permitted to meet three of the central executive committee’s elders, including Chairman U Aung Shwe, on 16 December 2009. Australia hopes that a meeting with the full executive will take place soon.

This is the first substantial contact which Aung San Suu Kyi has had with the leadership of the National League for Democracy since 2007, and is warmly welcomed by the Australian government as essential to democratic and political progress in Burma. Australia hopes these initial engagements between Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese authorities and the international community are the beginning of a process of genuine dialogue.

Elections

The Burmese authorities have embarked on the so-called ‘roadmap to democracy’, a strictly controlled process of potential political change. It was a matter of great regret that they pushed ahead with a constitutional referendum, the fourth step in their roadmap, in the midst of the disaster of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. That referendum was a regrettable sham. Not surprisingly, political
parties in Burma, including the National League for Democracy, and parties representing ethnic groups, are carefully considering whether to participate in the 2010 elections.

Burma’s authorities have an opportunity to engage the people, to ensure the full and free participation in the elections of the Burmese opposition, nascent political parties, and ethnic groups. For Burma’s longer term stability and security, the coming political process needs to address the concerns of the country’s diverse ethnic minority groups. While, of course, given the history of these matters, there are longstanding reservations, Australia will not prejudge the process and the outcome of these elections. Australia urges Burma’s authorities to seize this opportunity to genuinely move their country forward.

Development Assistance

Australia has long provided humanitarian assistance to Burma. In the 2009-10 budget, the government allocated nearly $30 million in humanitarian assistance, a significant increase in base funding over the previous year. This will help address the pressing needs of the Burmese people. Half of Burma’s almost 50 million people live in extreme poverty. Child mortality rates are among the highest in the world. Decades of military rule have eroded civil society and civilian institutions. Skills have been lost and infrastructure has deteriorated.

At some stage into the future, Burma will have a civilian government, which will face great challenges. At some stage into the future, the regional and international community will be asked to help in the rebuilding of Burma’s economic and social structures. Australia’s view therefore is that the international community help prepare Burma for the future. Burma’s capacity cannot be allowed to completely atrophy to the ultimate disadvantage and cost of its people. The international community needs to start the rebuilding now. This is not a reward for Burma’s military, but a recognition of the immense task faced by current and future generations of Burmese.

At around $4 per head per annum, international aid to Burma is less than a 10th of that received by Cambodia and a 16th of that received by Laos. Australia will accordingly increase its assistance to Burma over the next three years to around $50 million annually, a 40 per cent increase. Alleviating humanitarian needs will remain an important goal and focus of this expenditure. But the government has decided that Australia’s program will also include capacity-building elements, addressing the long-term challenges facing the Burmese people. This will involve carefully targeted interaction in areas of great need like health, education and agriculture.

Our assistance will continue to be delivered in partnership with international organisations, such as United Nations agencies, ASEAN, other donor nations and non-government organisations. We will expand existing initiatives in basic health care, including child and maternal health. We will work to improve the delivery of basic health services by equipping health clinics, training nurses, healthcare staff and administrators and providing better community health education and information. At the village level, we will assist primary healthcare workers, including midwives, with critical training and medical supplies to help arrest the decline in health outcomes for vulnerable and isolated people.

We will continue to support the delivery of vital treatment, prevention and screening services for HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, including through the Three Diseases Fund supported by Australia, the European Commission, the Netherlands, Norway,
Sweden and the United Kingdom. The fund aims to reduce these three diseases in Burma. We will also address critical water, sanitation and hygiene needs through:

- the construction and rehabilitation of ponds and wells;
- building latrines for community schools and rural health centres; and
- working to provide equitable access to clean water.

In 2008-09 Australia’s assistance contributed to the basic education of over 400,000 children in Burma. We will increase our support to enable more poor and disadvantaged children to go to primary school. Australian assistance will improve teaching and mentoring skills, both in the classroom and at home. Working closely with United Nations agencies, non-government organisations and other donors, we will support training programs for early childhood development workers, primary teachers and township education officials.

We will also continue to support vulnerable communities in the Irrawaddy Delta to restore their crop and fishing businesses, and in other areas of protracted need such as northern Rakhine State where the situation of the Rohingyas is very dire. Australia will provide $20 million over the next four years to assist poor communities in Burma to:

- improve access to credit, seeds, and tools;
- provide training in small enterprise;
- help farmers diversify their production and gain access to markets.

I have also asked the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and AusAID to explore a scholarship scheme for Burma. Australia will liaise with partners such as the European Union, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States, all of whom have scholarship schemes for Burma, to learn from their experience. It is proposed that a new scholarship scheme will target Burmese with the potential to build civil society and improve service delivery, including in health, education and agriculture. As a start, 10 postgraduate scholarships and short-term professional development placements will be made available, beginning in 2010-11. We will work with the UN to carefully identify suitable candidates.

This assistance will be in addition to Australia’s significant contribution for relief and recovery efforts following Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. Australia’s post-Nargis assistance continues to be delivered through effective and trusted aid partners such as the United Nations and Australian NGOs and includes:

- agricultural inputs to help farmers restore their crops and livestock;
- helping fishermen by providing nets and repairing boats;
- repairing over 1,200 damaged schools and providing books and materials for over 350,000 children;
- reducing disease risk by constructing 50,000 latrines and providing a million mosquito nets; and
- supplies and shelter for vulnerable communities.

Burma is a difficult operating environment, but the collective experience in Burma over many years shows we can deliver assistance effectively to improve the lives of ordinary Burmese citizens without benefiting the military authorities.

Until we see significant change from Burma’s authorities, the Australian government will maintain a policy of targeted financial sanctions. We agree with US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton’s, observation that to lift sanctions now would send the
wrong signal. However, an expansion of sanctions at this time would send a confusing signal. In view of the nascent discussions between the authorities and Aung San Suu Kyi, I have decided that sanctions should not be expanded at this time. As a result, the sanctions list I announced in October 2008 will remain in operation for the present.

**Diplomacy**

I earlier referred to my discussions on Burma in New York in September 2009. These discussions again revealed the region’s and the international community’s great frustration with the Burmese authorities’ treatment of the political opposition, their self-imposed isolation, and the circumstances of the Burmese people. My discussions also revealed that the international community is increasingly prepared to draw on a wide range of diplomatic tools, including both sanctions and engagement, to press for change in Burma. Neither Australia nor the international community however should have any illusions that progress in Burma will be quick or easy.

Australia will continue to work closely with ASEAN and its member countries, including by continuing to support ASEAN’s much-needed humanitarian efforts in Burma. We will cooperate closely with the United States as it pursues greater engagement with Burma, and with other major donors like the United Kingdom to ensure our combined assistance does the greatest amount of good for the Burmese people. We will also continue to support the work of the United Nations and the Secretary-General.

We endorse UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon’s, call for the international community to support UN efforts to promote respect for human rights, inclusive political dialogue and development in Burma. Australia strongly supported the role of Ibrahim Gambari as the UN Secretary-General’s special representative on Burma. His term concluded at the beginning of this year, and we look forward to working closely with his successor.

**Conclusion**

Australia and the international community stand ready to assist Burma. But it is not a one-way street. Australia urges the Burmese authorities to respond in good faith both to international engagement and to Aung San Suu Kyi’s recent approach to it on sanctions and on dialogue. In moving towards dialogue and genuine national reconciliation, Burma’s authorities can end their isolation.

Australia has always considered the Burmese people our friends. When Cyclone Nargis struck, Australia and Australians responded generously, despite our political differences with the Burmese authorities. That was the right decision then, and it is the right decision now, together with the international community, to do more for the long-term future of Burma’s people.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Curtin and Deputy Leader of the Opposition to speak for 19 minutes.

Leave granted.

**Mr STEPHEN SMITH**—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Ms J. Bishop (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 19 minutes.

Question agreed to.

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.40 pm)—Mr Speaker, recent developments in Burma are following a familiar pattern. Many around the world have watched Burma closely for decades, and have waited forlornly for signs that the brutal military regime would make moves towards democracy. We have waited
for a time when the gentle and beautiful Burmese people are able to live their lives in peace and freedom without the threat of violence, arbitrary imprisonment and slavery by their own government.

There are current concerns and worrying signs that the Burmese regime is pursuing a nuclear weapons strategy. However, the good news is that Burma’s military dictator, Than Shwe, has announced that elections will be held this year. If held, these will be the first elections in 20 years and the first held under Burma’s new constitution adopted in 2008—and this is the bad news. I remind the House that in 2008, when Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, the military rulers’ priority was to round people up to vote in a sham referendum to ratify the new constitution rather than focus on assisting those devastated by the cyclone. The referendum result was predictable for it was illegal to vote no.

Given the changes to the constitution and the military reaction to the last election in 1990, no-one should take any comfort from the charade that Burma is moving towards genuine democracy. An international law centre focusing on human rights has raised serious questions about Burma’s new constitution, which the centre believes has been designed to permanently entrench military rule. It is deeply disturbing to learn that the new constitution includes specific provisions that make the freedom and democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, ineligible to be elected as president or vice president, or to hold many key ministerial posts. The new constitution also ensures the head of the military will remain as the most powerful position in the nation, despite it being an unelected position. One-third of the members of parliament will be serving military officers who are under the direct command of the head of the military. And, in what appears to be a blatant breach of the Geneva conventions, the new constitution also removes all military matters from any civilian court or parliament, thus ensuring the military remains a law unto itself. Further, it appears that general amnesties are enshrined in the new Burmese constitution for all crimes by the junta and the military, including the use of rape as a weapon against ethnic minorities.

I remain deeply pessimistic about Burma while ever the brutal military regime remains in place, a pessimism shared by many around the world. However, against that background, I note that the United States has recently modified its policy toward Burma. The Obama administration has indicated a greater willingness for direct engagement with the military rulers in a move that has the potential to lessen Burma’s international isolation. In a statement on 23 September 2009 to the United Nations Group of Friends on Myanmar, the United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said that whilst United States policy objectives towards Burma remain the same, the United States will move towards a strategy of ‘concurrent engagement’ and sanctions.

The coalition in Australia will watch developments in United States policy towards Burma closely. We note that Assistant Secretary of State, Kurt Campbell, warned on 20 January this year that the United States will not be ‘unendingly patient’ as it engages in direct talks with Burma and that the United States would expect to see ‘clear steps’ towards democracy.

I have called on the Rudd government repeatedly to work with the international community to condemn the Burmese military junta and especially its treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for a significant part of the past 20 years. It has been reported that Aung San Suu Kyi has tentatively backed the United States policy change, although she has called for engagement with both the military regime in
power and the opposition, particularly the National League for Democracy. The coalition continues to extend its strong support for Aung San Suu Kyi in her efforts at leading her people to freedom and democracy. While the United States has indicated a degree of re-engagement with Burma, it has retained sanctions and continues to pressure the regime for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and free elections this year, and that is a position that the coalition supports.

Since 24 October 2007, Australia has implemented targeted autonomous sanctions against the Burmese regime and associates. The Australian government must continue to take all reasonable steps to ensure that pressure remains on the regime, and this will be even more essential as the election in Burma approaches. Our aid program in Burma must remain targeted at the most vulnerable people and respond to their humanitarian needs. It must not be allowed to enrich the elite, bolster the regime or undermine the ability of ordinary Burmese people to sell their produce by flooding the market with food aid.

One issue of concern that I must raise today is the government’s silence since the 2007 election in Australia on Labor’s commitment that it would take the leaders of the Burmese military junta to the International Criminal Court. The Burma Campaign Australia has detailed in its submission to the inquiry into human rights mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific that Labor in opposition made this commitment, including in emails to the campaign by the now Prime Minister. The then shadow minister for foreign affairs, Robert McClelland, issued a media release on 28 May 2007 which said:

Australia should request the UN Security Council to authorise the ICC—

the International Criminal Court—

to commence investigations into Burma’s leaders for crimes against humanity.

We are told that this promise to take the Burmese leaders to the International Criminal Court was repeated by the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, in October 2007.

But I must point out that Labor has now attempted to walk away from this position. During a press conference on 5 May 2008, the following exchange took place between a journalist and the Minister for Foreign Affairs:

QUESTION: It’s also the Burmese election next weekend. During the election campaign, the Labor Party promised to take their junta leaders to the International Criminal Court. Has there been any progress on that?

STEPHEN SMITH: Well, I’m not sure that’s right. I’m not sure that’s right.

QUESTION: Well, it’s something that McClelland said during the campaign and…

STEPHEN SMITH: I don’t think Robert McC…

QUESTION: …Rudd’s also put it in writing.

STEPHEN SMITH: I don’t think Robert McClelland said that in respect of Burma. We’ve made it absolutely crystal clear that we believe Burma should move to a democratic state where human rights are respected. It’s quite clear that the current referendum process, which the Burmese have in train, is nothing more, nothing less than a complete sham. I’ve made that point before and I’m … happy to make it again.

QUESTION: So you won’t be taking them to the International Court then?

STEPHEN SMITH: Well, I think if you check the record you’ll find that you’re mistaken in your assumption there.

There is no mistake in the assumption. The McClelland press release of 28 May 2007 is clear. The Prime Minister repeated that promise in writing to the Burma Campaign Australia in October 2007. The Rudd Labor opposition promised that, if they got into government, they would ask the United Nations Security Council to take the Burmese
military leaders to the International Criminal Court.

Now there is increasing concern among the freedom and democracy and human rights activists for Burma that the Prime Minister is walking away from his promise as he is seeking to appease countries in the region as part of his drive for votes to support Australia’s bid for a temporary seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2013-14. If that is not the case, and in order to dispel these concerns, the Prime Minister should spell out how and when he intends to have the Burmese military leaders referred to the International Criminal Court as he promised in October 2007 and as his now Attorney-General promised in May 2007. Or, yet again, is this another example where Labor is all talk and no action?

In responding to this ministerial statement on Burma, it is important to highlight the plight of freedom and democracy campaigner and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, whose ongoing treatment by the regime continues to provoke outrage around the world. As I said, Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest in Burma for about 14 of the past 20 years. The junta is well aware of Suu Kyi’s popularity among the long-suffering Burmese people. In the last election held in Burma, in 1990, Aung San Suu Kyi led a political party that won 82 per cent of the parliamentary seats in the national elections. The result was overturned by the military junta in a national crackdown that included the imprisonment of elected members of parliament.

Aung San Suu Kyi is a powerful symbol, not only as the daughter of the assassinated national independence hero General Aung San but also in her own right. Her sense of duty and justice and her commitment to a non-violent struggle for the cause of freedom for the people of Burma has proven to be unshakable. As I have said before in this parliament, I travelled to Burma in October 1995 and met with Aung San Suu Kyi at her home in Rangoon on the banks of Lake Inya. Hundreds of supporters were waiting outside hoping to catch a glimpse of their leader. I was met at the front gate and taken to a military checkpoint located in the garden, where my passport was checked, my details taken down and my photograph taken. I spent about an hour with Aung San Suu Kyi and observed to her that she was a prisoner in her own country and indeed in her own home, and she remains so.

The military junta in Burma stands accused of some of the most serious human rights abuses of any regime in the world. The 1988 uprising, when thousands of students and Buddhist monks were killed, with thousands of political prisoners held without trial, has been well documented. It is estimated that more than 2,000 people are held as political prisoners in Burma’s horrendous jails, and the junta is regularly accused of using forced labour, land and food confiscation, arbitrary beatings, recruitment of child soldiers and torture. The International Labour Organisation considered taking the junta leaders to the International Court of Justice over accusations that it had forced up to 800,000 people into virtual slavery. Disturbingly, the junta has also been accused by international human rights organisations of using sexual abuse and rape as a means of terrorising the population—hence my concerns that the new constitution grants a general amnesty to the junta and the military. There have been regular protests against military rule since the 1962 coup, but all have been met with violent suppression involving significant loss of life, including the more recent protest in 2007 led by Buddhist monks, who were shot or jailed. So Burma stands as one of the most repressive regimes...
in the world, and the world is now concerned that it has a nuclear weapons strategy.

Burma is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, which has set up a working group to establish a human rights framework in the region. Australia must urge the ASEAN working group to address the violations of human rights in Burma as one of its highest priorities. As the minister noted, the Rudd government has increased aid to Burma. In 2008-09 there was an increase by $5 million to $16 million, and the government has more recently allocated nearly $30 million in humanitarian assistance in the 2009-10 budget. It is vital for Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma, as well as the international community, that any increase in aid not be seen in any way as a tacit acknowledgement by the Rudd government of the legitimacy of the Burma regime.

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) (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.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (4.54 pm)—Prior to question time, I was commenting that the government has put forward an economically credible and prudent proposal that ensures it is supporting the jobs of today while substantively putting forward a scheme that will create the low-pollution jobs of tomorrow. I spoke about my involvement with renewable energy technology businesses and also their frustration at presently trying to commercialise their technologies without a price of carbon being established on a market base and without having their technologies taken to the share market with a view to raising capital to commercialise those technologies.

Mr Deputy Speaker Kelvin Thomson, I know you are fully across this; I heard your speech earlier today. You understand what these commercial and environmental innovators, renewable energy technology developers, are going through. Each and every member of this parliament would have had either a coffee or a tea with people from these renewable energy technologies who have gone to great pains to explain their frustration in developing low-emission technologies in this country at the moment, and that frustration has been at not having a market mechanism in place.
I think that is something crucial that comes through this suite of bills before us on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and cognate bills. As I say, the scheme is vital for commercialising these technologies, and these technologies are vital in our ability to combat climate change. It is all very well for the Leader of the Opposition to come out and say, ‘We’re going to mandate this and mandate that; we’re going to encourage people to do these various things,’ but the fact of life is that government itself—the bureaucrats—will not be out there determining what technologies go forward. What we need to do is make sure the commercial realities are that people can actually take these low-emission technologies forward to the marketplace to be able to back projects over the next 20 years. That is critical for having investment in the renewable energy sector, the sustainable energy sector and the whole gamut of low-emissions technologies that are currently subject to research and development.

Importantly, our actions on climate change will help protect and secure the economy and industries like agriculture and tourism, which account for thousands of people employed in this country. I say to the members opposite from Queensland that they will be only too well aware of the numbers involved in terms of the Barrier Reef, but agriculture accounts for a lot of people in this country. That is why our CPRS, our energy-trading mechanism, is supported by business groups like the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Industry Group and also the National Farmers Federation. They see why we are going down this path and they encourage certainty being developed in the marketplace.

I would also like to congratulate the member for Wentworth for the forthright and considered views that he put earlier today. I know that as a former Howard government environment minister he commissioned the Shergold report. I understand that through the development of policies leading to the 2007 election, when the establishment of an ETS was the current opposition’s policy, Mr Turnbull, the member for Wentworth, had a central view. I have to say that, unlike other people opposite, this fellow has stayed pretty consistent with the views that he expressed in this parliament from 2005 through to 2007. He has seen that there is a need for developing technologies and for having certainty in the business place. His considered view is similar to that of the Shergold report, which recommended the development of an ETS mechanism. Mr Turnbull, in his contribution earlier today, said:

This legislation—referring to the CPRS—is the only policy on offer which can credibly enable us to meet our commitment to a five percent cut to emissions by 2020 and also has the flexibility to enable us to move to higher cuts when they are warranted. So for those reasons I support this bill. The arguments I have made for it are no different to those I have made, and stood for, for the last three years.

It probably takes a lot of guts to get up and view the circumstances and do that. But it is plain that these are the views that he has held, the views that were mutually developed in a bipartisan way in the last election and the views that led to bipartisan support of an ETS. I recall only too well when the Shergold report came down that these were the considered views of all sides of politics, before the issue of party politics got involved. What a great thing leadership politics is.

We are now prepared to put the viability of environmental controls, to put the threshold issues associated with climate change, on hold to support leadership. I guess that was not quite what the member for Higgins had in mind when she gave her first speech ear-
lier today on wanting to make a difference. The only difference that is doing is highlighting to the Australian public that some people in this place are prepared to put into jeopardy future generations of this country to maintain a position of leadership today. That is not leadership and you would not even call it head-in-the-sand politics.

This was not just something that occurred; this was something that was very decisive. This came from a man who after the last 2007 election urged people to vote for the CPRS—just support it and get it off the table. This also comes from the fellow who is now the Leader of the Opposition and has had seven different and inconsistent positions when dealing with one of the most serious matters faced by our generation, that being climate change. He is not alone. With fairness to Mr Abbott, he is not alone in this. Bear in mind the position of Senator Nick Minchin, who obviously challenges the climate change science. Moreover, he actually summarises the view that underpins all those scientists out there and the world’s concern about climate change. He reckons it is a communist conspiracy designed to deindustrialise the Western world. They are not my words; they are his words or words pretty close to that effect. He may not have said ‘communist’, he may have said ‘leftist’, but this is the leader of the government in the Senate, that place over there, who summarised the position as being some form of communist conspiracy when we talk about climate change.

Certainly it is no surprise when the Leader of the Opposition refers to climate change as being, to use his words, ‘absolute crap’. You would wonder why you would take on a position of leadership addressing an issue as important as climate change—and there is no question that this is regarded as important to the voters out there—and yet treat with it such disdain. I suppose to some extent we have also seen those sorts of general out-there views now being supported by the chief opposition finance spokesman, Senator Barnaby Joyce. I have to say that, when he refers to things such as ceiling insulation as being that fluffy stuff in the ceiling that rats and mice urinate on, it shows how little they are concerned about taking steps to ameliorate the effects of climate change and to protect our environment.

I do not know whether Barnaby Joyce had a slip of honesty in the process, but it was very interesting when he came out and told us why the opposition would have a climate change policy if his leader thought it was absolute crap and if the leader in the Senate, Senator Minchin, thought it was a communist plot and he was clearly on the record as not having any regard for the science of climate change. He explains it with words to the effect that, to have a policy on climate change, you need to have something to pander to the views of the community. ‘Pander’ makes that sound pretty cheap, but pandering to the community is essentially what Senator Joyce rationalised as to why the opposition would not under any circumstance have a policy on climate change.

When he was pressed about how he was going to pay for the opposition’s position on it, it rolled off his tongue just like that: ‘Cut the Commonwealth Public Service and look at our aid placed overseas. We had better fix our own place up first so we can cut overseas aid projects.’ Clearly, that is an embarrassment to the opposition. He was obviously jumped on from a great height; but, as I say, he probably had a rare moment of honesty at the Press Club and decided to be open and honest with everybody and tell us his genuine views. We have the impression of Senator Minchin’s communist plot, the Leader of the Opposition’s view of it being absolute crap and Senator Joyce now having the view...
that you just have to have a policy if you want to pander to the electorate.

The choice is pretty clear on this. This legislation is a development of a policy which was supported by the opposition. We have embraced each and every one of their amendments. We have reduced that into the current CPRS bills. The population at large now has a very, very clear choice. It is a choice between the Rudd government’s position on climate change—one that caps emission levels through the CPRS, makes the big polluters pay, provides a mechanism to commercialise renewable technologies and provides financial compensation for families—and the opposition’s position of really wanting no change in support of their con job and in support of their leadership. This is what it is about—the protection of the Liberal leadership and nothing more and nothing less.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (5.06 pm)—This is now the third time that the House has considered legislation for the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and on each of the previous two occasions the opposition voted against the government’s CPRS, or emissions trading scheme. I would like to say at the outset that it is important that we take strong action on climate change, and an emissions trading scheme is but one possible response to taking action on climate change. So this is not a debate about whether we should take action on climate change or whether we should, as the Prime Minister often says, do nothing; it is about the best approach for the Australian economy—the most balanced approach which will enable us to achieve our environmental goals while at the same time reducing the dislocating impact on small businesses, on families and on households. Given that there is an enormous volume of science in this area—as we all know, there is currently a debate going on in the community—the prudent thing for any government is to take the scientific concerns seriously and, adopting the principles of risk management seriously, respond.

In fact, the Howard government took this approach in government. We set up in 1998 the Australian Greenhouse Office—the first country in the world to have an agency dedicated to raising awareness and coordinating practical responses to climate change. We had a number of initiatives encouraging industry to develop technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We had the Global Initiative on Forests and Climate, a very important way of getting carbon out of the atmosphere by reducing deforestation and protecting forests. While Australia only contributes about 1.4 or 1.5 per cent of global greenhouse emissions, the initiatives that we took under the Howard government saw Australia save 87 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions a year over the period that we were in government and going right up to 2010. That is the equivalent of taking out the emissions of the entire transport sector—all cars, all trucks, all buses. They were very significant initiatives. There was also the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate, which brought together the United States, Australia, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and India, who together make up 50 per cent of the world’s population, world’s energy use and world’s greenhouse gas emissions. It got all of those countries working together to use technological solutions to dramatically cut greenhouse emissions.

What was obvious last year was that we were all told that there was a rush to have this in place before Copenhagen. The problem is that it has become very obvious with the Prime Minister that the emperor has no clothes. There was no need to rush to deal with this before Copenhagen. Copenhagen was a disappointment; it underdelivered. In fact, it is almost like a metaphor for the Rudd
government: overpromised and underdelivered. But what we have now is a very clear choice between the government’s emissions trading scheme and the opposition’s direct action plan on climate change. There is a choice between a $114 billion tax on electricity and groceries for mums and dads and pensioners and a $10 billion direct action plan—a choice between a great big new tax and incentives for businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Both sides—the government and the opposition—are committed to a five per cent reduction in carbon emissions, but under the opposition’s plan businesses will be given direct incentives to take direct action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions below baseline levels. The direct action plan includes incentives to clean up power stations, to have one million solar roofs over the next 10 years, to plant 20 million trees and to have a once-in-a-century increase in the carbon levels of soils.

One of the things that we have not heard anything about from the government—it has been very quiet, very secret about this—is what the impact of their Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme will be on ordinary Australians, on working families, on mums and dads, on households. What we saw in question time today is that even the government’s own ministers—the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, for example—did not have a clue about the impact of the government’s own scheme on families. The Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy did not have a clue about the impact of this scheme on small businesses. There is a very interesting document that has been produced by the government. It is called Cameo analysis of household assistance package, and what it shows when you drill down in these tables is the impact that this will have on families and individuals. Take, for example, a family with two incomes, each $70,000, and three children. This would incorporate teachers, nurses, midwives—many different occupations—and a family like this will be $620 worse off under the Rudd government’s scheme. An individual on an income of $60,000—average weekly earnings, or thereabouts—will be $140 worse off under the government’s scheme. A two-income family, one on $98,000 and one on $42,000, with three children will be $808 worse off.

Consider the case of a single-income family where the principal breadwinner is a tradie, a steel fixer, a welder, a fitter, a plumber or a sparky and earns $120,000, with one child at primary school and one child at high school. This family will be $950 worse off under the government’s scheme. It is very obvious that the government has not been upfront about the impact of the emissions trading scheme and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Look at the situation for individuals. For a single person, once you are earning more than $40,000 a year you are worse off under the Labor Party’s scheme. Once a single-income family with no children earns an income over $60,000 they will be worse off under the government’s scheme. A two-income family with no children, once the parents are on incomes of $42,500 each—below average weekly earnings—will be worse off under the government’s scheme.

That is why the opposition will be voting against the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. It is now incumbent on the Labor Party to explain the impact that this scheme will have on working families and the impact that it will have on salary earners who are on very low incomes, well below average weekly earnings. That is why the opposition will be opposing these bills.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.16 pm)—I am very pleased to rise to support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill
2010 and the associated bills that are before the House today. This scheme is a comprehensive and effective response to climate change. It has been developed against a backdrop of overwhelming scientific evidence, international political consensus and, until a few weeks ago, with national political consensus and, importantly, in negotiation with the previous leadership of the coalition. It is a balanced, costed and market based response to one of the greatest challenges of our times. Put simply, the CPRS caps and reduces Australia’s carbon pollution for the first time ever. It makes polluters pay for their carbon pollution and takes the money raised from the polluters and provides cash assistance to working families. The government’s approach is measured and presents a wide-ranging scheme which is designed to redirect the Australian economy towards a low-carbon future.

In the last few weeks we have seen the Leader of the Opposition bring out his alternative policy. Really, when we drill down and look at this policy I think the Australian people will see that he is more interested in cheap political gain than in any real action on climate change. The Leader of the Opposition’s so-called direct action climate change proposal is nothing more than a climate change con job which will impose a tax on the Australian people and, in his own words, allow big polluters to continue with ‘business as usual’. Last week we saw the Leader of the Opposition describe the coalition’s newest policy as a carefully costed and capped policy, when in actual fact it is uncosted, uncapped and unfair on the Australian people. In the words of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the coalition’s latest response to climate change is an attempt to ‘concoct a window display without putting a price on carbon pollution’. In the same article, he appropriately described it as the ‘policy equivalent of dessert without a main course’.

What we have seen with the coalition’s policy is an absolute smokescreen when it comes to any real action on climate change. Instead of putting a cap on carbon, the Leader of the Opposition’s plan is actually designed around big polluters being encouraged to continue to emit carbon, whereas the government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme makes polluters pay for their emissions. The Leader of the Opposition’s policy is based on the idea that the government and the Australian people, not the big polluters, should foot the bill in abating emissions.

We have just heard the member for Boothby talk about being upfront. One thing we can say about the opposition’s policy is that they have not been upfront with the Australian people about where the money for their $10 billion scheme is going to come from. All we know is that the burden will fall on taxpayers. Will the money be cut from the budget, perhaps from services, as we heard in question time? The Leader of the Opposition is well renowned for the cuts he made to public hospitals. He cut close to $1 billion out of the public hospital budget. Or will the money come from new taxes? We are not sure, because the opposition have not been upfront with the Australian people about where their cost is going to come. When we talk about being upfront and clear about what our policy is—the government’s policy compared with the opposition’s—we know that whereas we have been very clear about the compensation scheme and where the money is going to come from the opposition have not.

The Leader of the Opposition’s policy was clearly developed in a cocoon, in which he is in denial about the reality of climate change. Outside this cocoon, the real world is literally heating up. The world has just come out
of the hottest decade in history. While last week the government reintroduced the CPRS into the House, the Leader of the Opposition was busy holding a private audience with Lord Monckton, a person whom even conservative journalists and the likes of Senator Barnaby Joyce have publicly been trying to distance themselves from. To put him in perspective, Lord Monckton is a person who believes that climate change is the trojan horse for a centralisation of communist power after the fall of the Berlin Wall. That sounds quite extreme, but if we turn our thoughts back to late last year, the shadow Treasurer was accusing the G20 of being part of a socialist conspiracy. So I guess Lord Monckton’s views do sit quite comfortably with the Liberal Party.

While the government has based its response to climate change on the global scientific consensus, including the work done by Australian scientists from the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, the Leader of the Opposition seems to be taking his scientific advice from an eccentric English mathematician who finds himself clearly on the fringe. Mr Champion—He is not even a mathematician.

Ms Rishworth—I know that the member for Wakefield will provide more information about Lord Monckton and his expertise. We have seen that Lord Monckton is on the fringe. It seems that the Leader of the Opposition is taking advice from this person and not the scientific consensus. It is unsurprising that someone who takes advice from the likes of Lord Monckton asserted some months ago that the world has actually been cooling. If he had bothered to look at the hard facts, the Leader of the Opposition would realise that 14 out of the 15 warmest years on record occurred between 1995 and 2009. With scientists telling us to expect average surface temperatures to rise between 1.1 and 6.4 degrees Celsius, it appears that the Leader of the Opposition is completely out of touch with reality. That is why he is advocating a business-as-usual approach as an answer to climate change.

It is understandable that people might be finding it difficult to keep pace with the Leader of the Opposition’s position on climate change. In fact, I have not been able to keep up with all six publicly recommended positions. First was blocking the CPRS, then passing the CPRS, then amending the CPRS and now proposing his own new taxpayer funded slush fund so that the big polluters can keep on going with business as usual. If people are feeling a little confused about where he or the coalition stands on the issue of climate change, I am certainly not surprised.

In my opinion, his real views on the issue are those expressed to the group of supporters at the function centre at the Beaufort football ground in Victoria on 30 September 2009 when he quite clearly stated that he felt that the argument for climate change was ‘absolute crap’. However, he did acknowledge that the politics of this are tough ‘for us’, as he put it, and that 80 per cent of people believe that climate change is a real and present danger.

Earlier, we heard comments about being tricky and about doing what is important for short-term political gain. I would assert that the Leader of the Opposition is being particularly tricky when it comes to the politics of climate change, looking for short-term solutions and smokescreens to try and trick the Australian people. But I believe that the Australian people will see through this. These comments really give us insight into the opposition leader’s policy response. He clearly sits in the camp of climate change fringe dwellers and sceptics, led by his mentors Senator Nick Minchin and Lord Monck-
ton, who do not believe that the world is warming and who in fact believe it is one great big left-wing conspiracy to try and de-industrialise the world.

But, instead of standing up for what he really believes, the Leader of the Opposition has sought to pull the wool over the eyes of the Australian people, announcing his deceptive and simple direct action policy. It is deceptive because it is designed for political purposes and not for addressing the real issue of dangerous climate change. It is simple, because he knows that it will not work and he does not care. This was clearly indicated by his comment that he thinks climate change is ‘absolute crap’.

In contrast to this real con job—the direct action policy presented by the opposition—the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme advocated by this government is not designed for political purposes. It is designed for the national interest. It is premised on the reality that there will be a price imposed on carbon emissions and that there will be a price imposed on polluters. Because the government recognises that there will be a modest increase in the cost of living of around 1.1 per cent, this government has provided direct compensation to householders. In fact, 90 per cent of all households will receive direct cash assistance under this scheme. To put these things in perspective, 90 per cent of low-income households will receive assistance equal to around 120 per cent of the overall increase in costs that they face under the CPRS.

The coalition will impose penalties on businesses which pollute above business-as-usual levels and nobody in the opposition has been able to explain what these penalties will be and how these penalties will impact consumers. One thing that we do know is that the opposition’s plan has no option to compensate consumers for these. This highlights the great irony in the Leader of the Opposition’s proposal. The coalition direct action policy, which is designed only for political purposes, with no intention to seriously address climate change, will actually be more harmful to Australian consumers and taxpayers.

To spell this out, experts in the Department of Climate Change estimate that, rather than reducing emissions by five per cent, the policy of the Leader of the Opposition and the coalition will actually increase Australia’s emissions by 13 per cent from 2000 levels. This 13 per cent increase in our emissions will come at a cost of a $10 billion tax bill for the Australian people in a four-year period. This figure does not include the price rises that penalised businesses will be forced to pass on to their consumers. The money for the Leader of the Opposition’s slush fund has to come from somewhere, and he has refused to rule out cutting funds to schools and defence. His shadow minister for finance has also failed to rule out increased taxes.

It is ironic that the Liberal Party is running away from the market. Considering that they are accusing us of creating a state-interventionist and communist system, it is ironic that they are running for the hills to get away from a market based system such as the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. But what it does is create a level playing field that encourages businesses to do what they can and to look at their options about how they might reduce carbon emissions. This is in quite stark quite contrast to the Leader of the Opposition, who has decided that if his scheme gets up then he will pick the winners—who will get the investment and who will not. Companies that will thrive under this system will not necessarily be the ones that are capable of producing low-carbon-intensive goods and services, because it will not be a market based system and it will not create incentives for companies to
do their best to reduce their carbon emissions. This is a real flaw in the system.

You do not need to go back very far when thinking about governments picking winners and losers. Your mind goes back to our minister for infrastructure who regularly raised the issue of the cloud-seeding technology against departmental advice. Not only was $2 million suggested but $10 million was also suggested. And I think we can see there some of the issues that come with governments picking winners and losers. All around the world, we see that governments are not in the best position to pick winners and are bad at the command and control of whole sections of the economy. We on this side of the House realise that it is inherently problematic and that Australia’s response to climate change should not be designed around a massive slush fund which seeks to directly pay companies to run abatement schemes so that our big polluters can continue to emit carbon pollution as business as usual.

In the medium term, the outcome of the Leader of the Opposition’s scheme is that Australian goods and services will become undesirable and expensive in the global economy. We see that more and more countries, including all of Europe, Japan and New Zealand, have either introduced or are in the process of introducing an emissions trading scheme. Most governments in the developed world are in the process of realigning their economies in preparation for a low-carbon future. If we do not do that, if we do not start preparing for our economy to be realigned for a low-carbon future, we will be left behind.

If Australian industry is encouraged to conduct their businesses and pollute under the illusion that business as usual continues, there is the real danger that we will become economically disadvantaged and incapable of taking a leadership role in new technologies and businesses and, in fact, new clean, green technologies that have the opportunity to be developed and manufactured here in Australia will move offshore. The Australian economy will fail to keep pace with the rest of the world in terms of new technology. At its worst, we will face the prospect of becoming economically backwards. It is really critical for a restructure of our economy to ensure that we can take advantage of being part of the world’s low-carbon future.

The government has designed and is introducing into the House a carbon pollution reduction scheme which is capable of responding to one of the greatest challenges of our time. It will serve to both restructure the Australian economy and compensate for the effects that a low-carbon future will have on low- and middle-income households. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is a thorough, complex and wide-ranging scheme which will affect all facets of the Australian economy. It is designed around a market based and merit based system, where the government’s role is reduced to setting emission reduction targets for the national economy in line with internationally agreed targets.

The opposition leader’s scheme might be simple to explain, but that is because it is designed for political purposes. It has very little to do with avoiding dangerous climate change. The shallowness of his policy is not surprising when you consider the sad truth that it has been commissioned by a leader who is out of touch with reality and is of the opinion that climate change is ‘absolute crap’. The Australian people need to be aware that the coalition is currently being led by a person who is prepared to stake the future of the world on sceptical fringe theories and who takes advice from an eccentric English aristocrat.
The whole world wishes that responding to climate change was as simple as Mr Abbott’s ‘direct action’ plan, but the reason that nothing even vaguely similar to Mr Abbott’s plan has been taken up by the government of any advanced economy is because it will not work. It is not designed to reduce emissions and it will not allow the Australian economy to enter into a low-carbon future on the front foot. Mr Abbott’s ‘direct action’ policy, is a climate change con job which will impose a big slug on taxpayers instead of polluters.

More than ever, Australia needs a responsible and truly national scheme to tackle climate change, and a scheme which is capable of addressing the environmental imperatives of reducing our carbon emissions. We need a scheme which can accurately forecast the modest increases in the cost of living and compensates those most affected. Fundamentally, we need a market based mechanism capable of guiding Australian industry into a low-carbon future. As a result of that, I commend the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation to the House.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (5.34 pm)—I have just listened to the member for Kingston and I could spend the next 20 minutes responding. I will give some time to addressing the comments she made. I happen to visit her electorate from time to time. I know it well—my wife was raised in Adelaide. I happen to know that the electorate of Kingston has a significant body of residents who gain their living in agricultural areas—wine and many other things. I thought she might be interested in an article published in the Perth Sunday Times on 27 December, in which the Australian Food and Grocery Council disputes her government’s estimate that the cost of a shopping trolley would only increase $68 per annum. A noted economist from ABARE called that ‘rubbish’. The Food and Grocery Council suggested a figure of $520 a year. This is the point for the member for Kingston. I quote from the council:

‘It seems the only way the government could have got this figure would be to base their modelling on significant reductions in Australian manufactured goods and a significant increase in supplies from cheaper priced countries such as China.

The member for Kingston has a constituency based to a great extent in South Australia, a state heavily reliant on food production and food processing. There are 300,000 Australian workers in the food industry—and the Food and Grocery Council says, ‘If you want to do what they have claimed, you better get everything from China.’ That is not a bad starting point.

The member for Kingston lectures, as everybody does—including someone from my side—that this is a market response. How can it be a market response if the government has about 10 or 15 centimetres of legislation? A market is cold turkey. If you are going to compensate everybody who turns up with a case, where is the discipline upon those people to reduce their emissions? The member for Kingston put the argument for a ‘pay to pollute’ response to the climate change legislation. She ran off all the repetition of her colleagues. Japan, she said, is going to have an ETS and then she said ‘or might do’. I think New Zealand has some form of legislation but it is not happening.

The minister got up the other day and said that there are 32 countries with an ETS. Well, the next speaker after me might name those countries. But I can tell you that they do not include China, they do not include India, they do not include India, they do not include China, they do not include Brazil and they do not include South Africa. They were the group who showed the door to our Prime Minister—who was going over to Copenhagen to run the show. They showed him the door. They made their decisions in his absence and would not give him
the time of day—he and his 114 public servants—and a group of Third World countries set the agenda at Copenhagen. And what was their message? It was: ‘We will advance our economies and, if that means more CO2 in the atmosphere, it is up to you, the so-called developed countries. I love the fact that even our Prime Minister thinks we are so rich that we can donate to China, India, Brazil and all these countries, but the reality is that they took no notice of him and would have taken no more notice if this parliament had passed this legislation prior to Copenhagen.

It is said that the coalition is out of touch, but it is offering incentives not penalties. As I have been saying for decades, there are great technological opportunities for Australia and most of them exist today and we may like to take the opportunity to be involved. The member for Kingston also accused us of picking winners. What is the compensation fund that is proposed by the Rudd government but picking winners? At one stage the electrical generators were going to get $3 billion. They asked for $10 billion and suddenly they are getting $7 billion. Is that picking winners? After the election, were the ACTU and associated unions winners? Were the employers winners? They are trying to keep this economy afloat with exports, and what is happening to them? There is a strike going on during the building of the biggest industrial program in Australia because the workers involved want to keep a motel-style room empty to store their toothbrushes in while they are away for their six days off. And do not tell me that they hang their clothes in there. I get on the same planes as they do—and they wear them up there and they wear them back. I sometimes wonder if they ever take them off. So do not give me that sort of stuff.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz)—Order! I warn the member for Wakefield that, if he persists in interrupting, I will deal with him. You will have your chance to speak in the debate in a very short period of time.

Mr TUCKEY—I am very grateful to you for reminding me that there is another South Australian MP in here, representing another district with a significant agricultural component, who is voting for a tax on farmers and voting, as the Food and Energy Council says, to replace production in his own electorate with product from China—because they are not having an ETS and they will be the ones who can achieve these figures. Please remember that in Treasury modelling, they have gone as far as to say: ‘These certificates will not be that expensive. They might be expensive in Australia, but you can buy them from China.’ That is in the white paper. That is in the modelling. So, anyhow, we know we have two South Australians in here who do not give a damn about the people, jobs and productivity in their own electorates. I will make sure my relatives, who live around that country, are well aware of those points.

But let me just touch on a few of the generics associated with this legislation and the claims that it will work. Firstly, it is said that we have a situation where this legislation has been backed rock-solid by scientists. I have stayed out of that argument because I do not have the competence to say yes or no. I might add that I got very high marks in chemistry and physics when I was at school but I did not proceed to climate change technology. But what I can tell you is that, recently, the media has been full of examples of very dodgy science—like the 15,000 glaciers of the Himalayas that are all going to melt completely by 2035. Apparently that was taken out of some schoolkid’s composi-
tion. So, if you are worried about the reality, the science is still in play.

I have heard the Great Barrier Reef mentioned about a thousand times in this debate. The reality is that, if you evacuated Australia and there were no significant decisions or responses taken in other parts of the world, whatever is going to happen to the Barrier Reef will happen. It appears from some of the comments of scientists that it is doing pretty well—but we will disregard that! Then, of course, we are going to be confronted with these terrible cyclones—they are going to increase in intensity. I had the roof blown off my hotel in 1961 and nobody said that that was the result of climate change. But let me remind you what the last two highly intense ones have done. They have flooded western New South Wales and Queensland. They have broken the drought. There is a chance for the two members I have so far mentioned that some of that water will get to Adelaide. If that is a problem, write me a letter about it. It is only the big cyclones that get into that hinterland—and that has been for as long as the history of the Australian climate.

I have already mentioned the extent to which the developing countries dominated Copenhagen. There is the argument that an ETS can be a market based solution. The market is when government keeps out of it. This government is setting the pattern, selling the certificates and saying who can buy them—and that includes the hedge funds who could drive the price up as they did the price of petrol, then go broke and be bailed out by the government of the day when that goes sour on them. Again, it is distorted by selective compensation payments, which will clearly undermine any discipline to reduce emissions by parties in receipt of such payback. There is a great dispute in this place as to whether or not the compensation proposed is sufficient, and the examples where it will not be are legion. But if you get fully compensated where is the market discipline? Do you consequently not buy an air conditioner? Do you consequently tell the kids to turn the lights off, and will they take any notice of you? That is it.

When Treasury modelling was conducted there was a promise that there would be a global market in emissions trading. Where is that? Just about everybody of substance in the emissions business said no. Of course, President Obama, having lost a seat that the Democrats have only held for 40 years at about a 60 per cent margin, is saying: 'Oops, maybe “yes we can” is “yes we can’t”.' If America is not involved, where is the international marketplace where these things are supposed to work?

The Rudd government is convinced by its own rhetoric in this third proposal to the parliament. The cost of the initial issue of certificates to consumers and exports is admitted by the government to reach $115 billion. That has got to come out. The cost to many of these so-called nasties—the thousand worst polluters—and the fact that they probably provide about 80 per cent of Australia’s employment is not even considered. They are just the nasties for the purpose of politics. Exporters can respond to this tax by job cuts and those with a captive market like the electricity generators can respond by putting up their prices. I have said before in this House that, if you are a person of considerable wealth who puts your hand on your heart and says, ‘I’ll pay more for my electricity to save the planet,’ you are paying more for your electricity so your electricity generator can buy the certificates necessary to keep polluting. The idea is that, when all this money has gone into the government’s coffers for some apparently selective picking winners-type payback, in the delaying period after you have paid the tax and completely depleted your cash reserves you are going to
rush out and do something positive to save the planet. This is unlikely and possibly impossible.

The member for Throsby is leaving the parliament and she now seems to ask a few dorothy dixers about climate change. BlueScope Steel have to use coke to make steel. There is no other solution available as yet. They are just going to have to pay the tax. They might reduce their workforce. They might say: ‘We now know for certain that China and India are not going to have an ETS. Their labour force is still cheap and we will go there.’ Goodbye, BlueScope Steel. Is this a good idea? The coalition says to BlueScope Steel, ‘Look, if there is anything left in your box that could improve your efficiency and reduce your carbon consumption, come along and see us and we will participate in paying you to achieve that outcome.’ That is the difference. That is called picking winners.

Furthermore, my website www.wilsontuckey.com.au has the only contribution from any member of this House that proposes practical solutions to climate change. I think there are opportunities to leverage off this debate, whether it is right or wrong.

Mr Champion—Tidal power.

Mr TUCKEY—The member for Wakefield mentions tidal power, and I thank him for that, but there is a bigger issue. It is called high voltage DC current transmission. That will be the pipeline for big ticket renewables and low emissions. It is an interesting fact that natural gas does not run down a pipeline on its own. The pipeline between the Pilbara and Perth is consuming over 200 megawatts of energy for the pumping process. That is a pretty average sized powerhouse in comparison. It is about 700,000 tonnes of emissions. If we stop taking the gas out in Perth and turning it into electricity but did that in the Pilbara, we would have more capacity in the pipeline for people who want heat, we would have the security of duplication and we could bring that electricity down on HVDC over about 1,000 kilometres into the south-west network and in the process only lose about three per cent of the power.

The Europeans are starting to wake up to this. This government says, ‘Let’s have photovoltaics all over the place in cloudy parts of Australia.’ The Europeans are going into North Africa and looking at huge gigawatt-size stations. Western Australia only has a total generating capacity of about three gigawatts. The Europeans are talking about single stations or a collection of stations of that size in North Africa, and they propose to send that power over 3,000 kilometres back into Europe. The loss of power is 10 per cent. If you used our dodgy AC system, it would be 45 per cent.

Where are the investment opportunities in this scheme to do that? If you look at the coalition proposal, you will find a $2 million commitment to further investigate an HVDC system. I see it as identical to something done by Charles Court, former Premier of Western Australia. Woodside had a find but nothing else, and Charles Court said, ‘On behalf of the people of Western Australia, I will buy more gas than they can use and I will fund the pipeline.’ Today the pipeline is overstressed and this parliament gets huge amounts of revenue from the industry that followed that initial development. His son, the then minister and former Premier, sold that pipeline to the private sector for about three times what Charlie paid for it.

What is wrong with a government statutory authority being established, after due inquiry, as our leader proposes, to undertake the original introduction of an HVDC system? I would start it on the Pilbara to Perth pipeline. I would build a line across to South
Australia and I would interconnect them. As the gas comes ashore in Browse, I would build it up there too. At the end of that, with another line from South Australia to New South Wales, I would have spent about $5 billion. All the benefits of doubling the amount of power running down the wire are as good as having a renewable energy power station. If you go through the desert on the way, and you obviously do for South Australia, it then becomes practical to produce 2.4 gigawatts of wind power, because the HVDC system can accommodate the variability in the generation that comes from that. South Australia could have 2.4 gigawatts of extra power generation at a price that people could afford. (Time expired)

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (5.54 pm)—I rise to support the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related bills. I begin by apologising to you, Deputy Speaker Schultz, for testing your patience earlier. It is always good to follow the member for O’Connor. We always learn something from him, something technical in this case, although he was sounding a bit like Rex Connor towards the end of his speech.

This legislation is probably the most important legislation this parliament will debate in a generation. The decisions we make will have a profound effect on the way we live now and into the future. In my contribution, I would like to refer to the scientific consensus as it now stands, the policy options that stand before us, the views of the prominent climate sceptic Lord Monckton and the nature of opposition to this legislation.

The scientific consensus as set out by the IPCC’s working group in their report, Climate change 2007: the physical science basis, says that there is no question that the climate has warmed and that it is now very likely that greenhouse gas emissions related to human activity caused most of the warming that has been observed since the mid-20th century. In the previous assessment report, in 2001, the IPCC had only considered it likely. They found that global climate change over the past 50 years is extremely unlikely to have been caused by natural variability alone. These findings are a result of sophisticated computer modelling that takes into account greenhouse gases produced through human activity and also through the effects of the sun, aerosols and land use.

The current rate of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is approaching 380 parts per million, which is the highest rate in 650,000 years. That rate increased during the industrial era and is likely to be unprecedented in more than 10,000 years. Ice core samples show that for the past 10,000 years preceding the industrial era, atmospheric carbon dioxide has been stable at 260 to 280 parts per million and the level of 280 parts per million has been around for roughly the 750 years preceding the industrial age. Human activities have increased that rate to 380 parts per million. Nitrous oxide levels have increased by 19 per cent and methane gas levels have doubled—they are all greenhouse gases. The warming that has occurred in the second half of this century can only be explained in the computer modelling if human induced changes in greenhouse gas emissions are included in those computer models.

To put the amount of carbon that is emitted in an easily digestible form for the benefit of the House and anybody listening, human beings add 6.5 billion tonnes of carbon each year through burning fossil fuels. They add another one to two billion tonnes of carbon through erosion, land clearing and soil degradation. They are extraordinary figures when put on a global scale. Like the member for O’Connor, I have no scientific expertise. I am reliant on the scientific community for their advice. As a layman, it seems to me that if you pump 6.5 billion tonnes of carbon into
the atmosphere, it might have some effect on the balance of things and some effect on our fragile planet.

We have the recent example of the hole that has been caused in the ozone layer. We know that was caused by seemingly small amounts of CFCs from our refrigerators and cooling systems, and that that had a very large impact on the world around us. It depleted ozone in the atmosphere. The world responded through the Montreal protocol, an international treaty to ban these chemicals. The sky did not fall in because of international action. The economy did not fail. No world government was enacted. What actually happened was that the use of CFCs declined and alternative chemicals for use were found by private enterprise. We changed our ways and, as a result, ozone levels in the atmosphere are likely to be restored to 1960 levels by 2050. So we had an international treaty, based on recommendations of scientists and backed by the leadership of nation states, which solved a problem through the dynamic innovation of private enterprise.

It has been done in other areas, too. Acid rain in the United States was resolved through a cap-and-trade scheme. The problem was fixed by the US government constructing a market and private industry responding to that market. The result was not economic collapse and the result was not world government. The results were that acid rain was stopped, industry fixed the problem and it was fixed at a lower cost than anybody predicted—not at a higher cost than people predicted but at a lower cost. A similar scheme was used in the United States for the transition from leaded to unleaded petrol and, again, the result was that government gave leadership and created a market system and that market system induced private enterprise to produce a public good. Without those cap-and-trade schemes, this public policy outcome would not have occurred or it would have occurred at much greater cost.

The CPRS legislation before us today is no different in principle from the US government’s approach to acid rain. The need to act is backed by the weight of the scientific evidence that we have at this time. The government is providing leadership and direction for the public good and the national interest. A market is being created so that private enterprise will respond. This market will be based on sound principles. The first principle is that the polluter should pay for the permits to emit greenhouse gases; that the market, through the trading of these permits, will best know how to allocate the costs and risks passed the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 that the United States saw any meaningful reduction. The amendments enabled the EPA to place a national cap on emissions of sulfur and nitrogen oxides while allowing polluters to trade permits amongst themselves. Using 1980 emission levels as the baseline, the program aimed to cut emissions of sulfur dioxide in half by 2010. In 2007, three years ahead of schedule, the agency’s cap-and-trade program achieved its reduction targets. The cost to emitters, which the Congressional Budget Office had estimated would be $6 billion a year, came instead to about $1.1-$1.8 billion a year, largely because the program enabled emitters to choose their own solutions to the problem, rather than relying on a narrow range of mandated technologies and approaches.

There is some indication there that a similar scheme was used to solve a similar problem and fixed it, and it fixed it at a lower cost than anybody predicted—not at a higher cost than people predicted but at a lower cost. A similar scheme was used in the United States for the transition from leaded to unleaded petrol and, again, the result was that government gave leadership and created a market system and that market system induced private enterprise to produce a public good. Without those cap-and-trade schemes, this public policy outcome would not have occurred or it would have occurred at much greater cost.

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associated with such emissions; that the market, through capital allocation, is most likely to effectively reward risk, to encourage innovation and to drive efficiency; and that the government should assist our export industries to protect our international competitiveness because, as previous members have said, those exporters cannot easily pass the prices on.

The other principle is that low- and middle-income earners should be compensated for the price effects from the creation of this new market. This is not some invention of the Australian Labor Party. Rather, it is the invention of a range of experts—a range of people from across the policy divide—who think that this is the appropriate way to go about lowering emissions. Nicholas Stern, an economist and a person of great reputation, said:

Expanding and linking the growing number of emissions trading schemes around the world is a powerful way to promote cost-effective reductions in emissions and to bring forward action in developing countries.

In addition, the Shergold report, which has been quoted many times in this debate, stated:

By placing a price on emissions, trading allows market forces to find least cost ways of reducing emissions by providing incentives for firms to reduce emissions where this would be cheapest …

That is why the Howard government was committed to introducing an emissions trading scheme. It was why the Liberals, under the responsible leadership of the member for Wentworth, backed amended CPRS legislation. You have to compliment the member for Wentworth. He did, I think, a courageous thing in this House today. He made a courageous speech, the type of speech that is not made in this House very often, and I think he is to be commended for it. It does take some courage to fly in the face of your party and it takes some courage to do it on the floor of the House of Representatives.

It is a great pity that the current opposition has ignored all reason and adopted a policy that slugs the taxpayer rather than the polluter, that is underfunded and will either result in higher taxes or cuts to services and that relies on government directive rather than a market mechanism to allocate risk, create innovation and drive efficiency. We know that, at best, this approach has profound limitations and that, at worst, it has inherent public risk associated with it—the great risk of crony capitalism. Finally, this policy will increase emissions by 13 per cent over 2000 levels. At the end of spending all this money, it will have increased emissions. Even the coalition’s own researcher, David Pearce from the Centre for International Economics, has said, according to the Australian Financial Review today:

… the apparent simplicity of the coalition plan would soon disappear if it were ever implemented, because so many technical aspects of the strategy had been left unresolved.

The cost of the scheme could also rise significantly once details such as penalties on the assignment of risk were taken into account.

At the end of the story, the article says:

The principal architect of the coalition plan, opposition climate change spokesman Greg Hunt, admitted to The Australian Financial Review that this was an aspect of the scheme that would need to be resolved.

He said that about some problems they were having with farmers. These are some extraordinary admissions about a policy that is designed to fail. It is just a political stunt—very immature, very short-sighted and very irresponsible.

One would ask: what is driving this sudden change in policy by the Liberals? What has made them shift 180 degrees? The Liberal Party have said that Copenhagen caused the change in policy, but I think that it is ac-
tually a fellow called Lord Monckton. You cannot really have a discussion about climate change without examining the credibility of the lead sceptic. I have to say that I do not have anything against Lord Monckton. He seems like he would be an interesting person to have over for a dinner party. He is eccentric and controversial. He also possesses a certain charisma and good old-fashioned English charm, politeness and good manners; but he does have a long history of form on public policy issues. He has a history of holding extreme views in public policy debates. Let us take his view on AIDS. In 1987, Christopher Monckton, a former special adviser to Margaret Thatcher, wrote an article for the *American Spectator* titled ‘AIDS, a British view’. In it he said:

Yet both reports fail to draw the unwelcome but undeniable conclusion from the disquieting evidence which they present. For there is only one way to stop AIDS. That is to screen the entire population regularly and to quarantine all carriers of the disease for life to halt the transmission of the disease to those who are uninfected. Every member of the population should be blood-tested every month to detect the presence of antibodies against the disease, and all those found to be infected with the virus, even if only as carriers, should be isolated compulsorily, immediately, and permanently.

He went on to say that his program of action is radical, universal, undeniably contrary to individual liberties, et cetera. It is quite an extraordinary article. He finishes the article by saying:

Although the idea of universal testing and isolation now sounds extravagant and preposterous, it will eventually happen.

We know that Lord Monckton was wrong about that. He was absolutely wrong and he admitted that he was absolutely wrong later on when he was trying to sell puzzles to the public and he had to back off. He said:

Although I did mention quarantine and compulsory testing, I also said it was incompatible with liberal democracies and placed national authorities in an immense dilemma of enacting an unthinkable infringement of basic liberties.

While quarantine may have been an option 12 years ago, it is now obviously far too late to even consider a measure like that.

He said that on 28 August 1999 and has since backed away from that. In his latest National Press Club appearance he had a whole slide based on it and he said, regarding the AIDS epidemic, ‘That is the correct policy’ in regard to quarantining. So we know that Lord Monckton swings around the place a great deal. He told a South Yarra audience about the crash of a NASA satellite. He said:

Not greatly to my surprise—indeed I predicted it—the satellite crashed on take-off because the last thing they want is real world hard data …

That is what he told a climate sceptics lunch in South Yarra. The other day at the National Press Club, someone asked him what he would do to free science from prejudice and from the state interfering in it. I transcribed this myself off APAC. He said:

The first thing we have to do is stop funding science as taxpayers, that is a mistake, there is only one customer these days, and that is the state. Ninety-nine per cent of all science is bought and paid for by the state, via the taxpayer, whether the taxpayer likes it or not. That induces a culture of dependency much the same as someone living on the dole. The scientists are all like this and therefore begin to pander to what the state wants.

What he is suggesting there is that we end all state funding for science—which is a pretty radical proposal. Like I said, Lord Monckton is a likeable sort of fellow and he is very charming and all the rest of it, but I do not think that his views are practical or desirable and I think that Australians would find them extreme. You would have to wonder what influence he is having over Australian domestic policy.
I noticed the other day that the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Warringah, met with Lord Monckton. I do wonder what they discussed in their meeting. Did the Leader of the Opposition, as a former health minister, discuss Lord Monckton’s views on AIDS and the quarantining proposal? Did they discuss communism and the green movement, as the member for Kingston talked about? Did they discuss the conspiracy of radicalised scientists? Did they discuss the ending of all government funding for scientists? Did they discuss the crash of a NASA weather satellite? I think we are entitled to know how Lord Monckton is affecting Australian domestic policy. I think it is a very important question. I do not think that people should be judged by the company they keep, but the Leader of the Opposition is a significant figure in Australian politics. He has changed his policy. He has met with this leading climate sceptic who has had a tour of the country—a very successful tour by all accounts; he had packed-out audiences—but I think we are entitled to know what Mr Abbott and Lord Monckton discussed.

We have a right to know whether this parliament is going to be used as a cipher for Lord Monckton’s views. We have a right to know if this parliament is going to be used as an incense burner to Lord Monckton’s vanity. We have got a right to know whether or not it is going to be used as a crucible to his policy fantasies. I think the Leader of the Opposition should reveal to us what subjects were discussed in his secret meeting with Lord Monckton. Whether or not he agrees with Lord Monckton’s views is irrelevant, but we should be entitled to know exactly what was on the agenda for the meeting, whether or not there are going to be any future meetings, whether or not there is going to be any future contact, whether or not there are going to be any phone calls and whether or not, under an Abbott government, Lord Monckton would be sitting over here in the ‘honoured visitors’ gallery. Perhaps he would be there—this batty English lord—giving policy advice to a future Abbott government. I think we are entitled to know all of that, and I would like to hear from the opposition about the nature of the meeting and what was discussed.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (6.14 pm)—I rise to oppose the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and cognate bills. As I said the first time I spoke on these bills, this is seriously flawed legislation that will cost Australian jobs. It will cost investment and will compromise our historic, internationally competitive marketing advantage underpinned by cheap energy. However, as a result of the coalition’s direct action plan, Australians now have a clear choice of, as the Leader of the Opposition says, ‘a big new tax on everything’ or practical direct action. One example of somebody who will be affected is David, a constituent from my electorate, a young man who is single, works as a trades assistant and, under the Labor government’s ETS, will be at least $140 worse off every year.

All sectors of the economy and every Australian family, every individual, every small, medium and large business, every contractor and industry—everyone in my regional and rural electorate—will be affected by this flawed tax policy. This legislation will raise prices for all consumer goods and services, add to the cost of living for every Australian and have a major impact, particularly on small businesses, by increasing electricity and input costs, without providing those same small businesses with any form of compensation to mitigate the 20 per cent increase in electricity costs. Some small businesses will pass on the increased cost to consumers, but the Labor government expects small businesses in the agricultural
sector, which are, by majority, price takers, to simply absorb the additional costs.

The Labor government’s ETS will cost Australian jobs. As I said, there is no mention of compensation—only extra cost—for the 750,000 small businesses in Australia, and certainly there is no mention of compensation for the 13,400 small businesses in my electorate. The drycleaners, the retailers, the hairdressers and those in the service sector—particularly those who cannot pass on additional costs, like farmers and horticulturalists—will all see increased costs. We know, however, that electricity for households will be cheaper under the coalition’s direct action plan. The total cost of the coalition’s direct action plan is $3.2 billion over the first four years, while the government’s ETS will cost $40 billion over those first four years and $120 billion by 2020.

Another issue which appears to have been deliberately ignored by the government is the fact that the cost of the ETS tax will be compounded repeatedly on goods and services. Every part of the supply and value chain will add to the ETS cost. In regional and rural areas, as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker Schultz, costs are already higher than in city centres. The ETS will compound this further with additional costs for electricity, food, groceries, fuel and other essentials like heating and cooling, which are often a necessity in regional and more remote areas, particularly for pensioners and those with health and mobility problems.

The Prime Minister has guaranteed ‘absolutely’ that no pensioners would be worse off under the scheme, but does this include pensioners in regional and remote communities, like those in my electorate, who will face comparatively higher costs under the ETS on everything they use and consume? There is no assistance, again only extra costs, for self-funded retirees. All of the people in my electorate who have worked all their lives, contributed to the economy and their communities, taken responsibility for providing for their retirement and health care—and who take a huge burden from the government—will absorb and bear higher costs to live.

In contrast, the coalition’s climate action policy provides incentives for Australian families and businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and focuses on effective and direct action to improve Australia’s environment, sustainability and food security. Our policy is about investing in a future that delivers job opportunities as well as providing incentives to reduce emissions. Our direct action plan does not impose additional costs on families and households and it includes the introduction of a range of measures to encourage and support the increased uptake and use of renewable energy in homes and communities. The coalition’s strategy also commits to solar towns and solar schools, geothermal, tidal, high-voltage underground cabling, support for renewable fuels, retention of the Greenhouse Friendly program and green corridors and urban forests.

In my electorate of Forrest, there is a genuine interest in energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and options for the future. We need further innovation and investment in improved storage, transmission and delivery of energy. We have heard consistently from the member for O’Connor about HVDC transmission. Late last year, West Perth based Green Rock Energy announced that it had been granted three geothermal exploration permits within the town of Collie in my electorate, where a substantial proportion of Perth’s electricity supply is generated from power stations.

The Prime Minister, in question time, has been forced to admit that electricity prices will increase by seven per cent and 12 per cent in the first two years of the ETS. The
government talks of compensation, but how long will this be offered and when will the full cost actually hit families given that, as we know, the New South Wales pricing regulator recommended a 62 per cent increase in electricity charges, one-third of which will come from the proposed emissions trading scheme?

I note that the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Wong, is at this moment pre-empting a decision by this parliament, potentially wasting further taxpayer funds by seeking tenders for a carbon emissions auction system through a 123-page tender document. I look forward to the Senate estimates revealing the cost of this for taxpayers. We have heard from the Auditor-General of the waste of $17 million of taxpayers’ funds on the first, fatally flawed, costly NBN tender process. Clearly, wasting taxpayers’ money seems to be business as usual for the Rudd government. I look forward to the Senate estimates revealing the cost of this for taxpayers. We have heard from the Auditor-General of the waste of $17 million of taxpayers’ funds on the first, fatally flawed, costly NBN tender process. Clearly, wasting taxpayers’ money seems to be business as usual for the Rudd government. I look forward to the Senate estimates revealing the cost of this for taxpayers. We have heard from the Auditor-General of the waste of $17 million of taxpayers’ funds on the first, fatally flawed, costly NBN tender process. Clearly, wasting taxpayers’ money seems to be business as usual for the Rudd government. I look forward to the Senate estimates revealing the cost of this for taxpayers.

Just imagine that you are fortunate enough to be travelling overseas—maybe you are in Brazil, Korea, Thailand or even Copenhagen—and you decide to have a meal. Of course, you are going to have some meat with your meal, and I hope that the meat is either Harvey beef, Dardanup butchers tender ridge or V&amp;V Walsh’s Amelia Park lamb or beef. You might also have some Harvey Fresh or Challenge dairy products, and I hope you will have a Donnybrook apple-and-pear pie and some wine from the Margaret River region—all from my electorate in the south-west of WA. But that consumption will not be reflected in the carbon footprint of South America, Asia or Denmark; it will be reflected in the carbon footprint of Australia.

Locally grown and produced products will also be competing with imported produce that does not have the cost of an ETS included in the cost of production. The Sunday Times of 27 December had an article entitled ‘ETS bungle on food bill’. It noted the government’s estimate of a $68 annual increase in the weekly supermarket trolley, and the Food and Grocery Council’s chief, Kate Carnell, is quoted as saying the council believes the increase would be $520 per annum. But, from my point of view, this is the interesting quote. Kate Carnell said:

“It seems the only way the Government could have got $68 would be to base their modelling on significant reductions in Australian manufactured goods and a significant increase in supplies from cheaper priced countries, such as China.”

“The 300,000 Australian workers whose jobs are involved could have significant problems with that.”

As a farmer, I have serious problems with that. And we have the return of the melamine issue in China, and I have very serious issues with that.

The Labor government’s ETS will see major Australian supermarket chains importing even greater amounts of Chinese, Asian,
South African and South American food at the expense of Australian farmers. That is something farmers in my electorate are very well aware of. The majority of them, as we know, are already price takers. How will Australian farmers, including in the south-west of Western Australia, compete with countries that maintain subsidies and do not have the added production cost of an ETS? The clear majority of farmers I know and have worked with for many years have an innate and direct respect for the environment. Often they are intergenerational farming families. They know from experience that they need to pass on their constantly evolving and improving land, water and pasture management practices. They do not stand still. Every day, they are environmental managers on their properties. They directly contribute to biosequestration through pastures, managing vegetation and tree planting. Many of them are members of land care and sustainability groups. They are constantly proactive. They very clearly and directly understand the need for the triple bottom line in their businesses: economic, social and environmental sustainability. Our businesses, our families, our farms and our communities depend on it. This is our livelihood today and the future of Australia’s food security and agricultural exports—the very exports which kept Australia out of technical recession during the global financial crisis.

I also note that a University of California study estimated that livestock contribute about three per cent of global emissions, not the estimated 18 per cent—and we see no credit for sequestration in the estimate of 18 per cent. As I have mentioned in the past, farmers and small businesses will pay more for virtually every input from day one of the government’s flawed ETS. The cost of fertiliser, fuel, chemicals, dairy and horticultural supplies—all farming supplies—will increase. The cost of production will increase. Under the proposed legislation, Australia’s approximately 150,000 farming businesses and family farms will be hit with a tax across their input costs.

There is no doubt that the ETS will reduce farm profitability. This will come as a major blow, because Australian farmers have been at the forefront of environmental management through zero- and low-till crop sowing, through water-use efficiencies, through weed control and through changes in fertiliser management. We see it on farms every day. Modelling has shown that the Rudd government’s emissions trading tax will impose costs of between $6,000 and $9,000 on the average dairy farm each year—and I believe that is a conservative estimate. My electorate is the home of approximately 170 dairy farmers in Western Australia. The majority of those farmers are price takers. They have virtually no capacity to pass on any additional cost of the Labor government’s ETS. The government must be honest with the Australian people and explain exactly how much the ETS will cost, and what costs will be added to the permit exchange process through profiteering by agents, traders and bankers. Price volatility in trading pollution permits under the ETS will not necessarily provide additional certainty to business. What it may do, however, is make it very difficult for business to have the financial capacity to invest in low-emissions technology.

The US government is now working on direct action. One example is the announcement of an agreement with dairy producers to adopt innovative anaerobic digester technology for manure-to-energy projects on American dairy farms. That is just one example. It was stated in a recent article that dairy producers and the innovation centre of the US Department of Agriculture are working together to reach a 25 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and
that anaerobic digesters routinely generate enough electricity to power 200 homes.

In my electorate recently, Griffin Coal was placed in involuntary administration, placing the jobs of over 500 workers and contractors at serious risk, as well as impacting on local and regional businesses, community service organisations, sporting organisations and, of course, our families. I know that, over many months, representatives of the company met with Minister Wong to explain how much the Labor government’s ETS would cost Western Australia’s coal fired power generators. But none of their issues—including an adjustment to the Electricity Sector Adjustment Scheme and the different characteristics of the WA energy market compared to the national energy market—have been included in the Labor government’s ETS legislation.

The company also queried what the Labor government will do for the many emissions intensive industries included under the ETS that are funded by project financing arrangements containing clauses which are triggered by significant market events, enabling financiers to exit projects completely. There is no doubt the ETS tax would be rated as a significant market event by financiers. The government has not explained how it would prevent this and has not provided economic analysis on the impact this will have on WA families and businesses. I just wonder whether the government will simply watch private investment being withdrawn from power generation as a result of the ETS tax. I have no doubt that, with the Labor government’s determination to force its emissions trading scheme through the parliament, financial institutions have been and will be factoring in a high-risk cost to finance or refinance coal fired power generators. The ETS will have further impacts on major employers in my electorate through the aluminium and mineral processing sectors and industries, not to mention the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

I will repeat what I have said each time I have spoken on the ETS. This legislation is seriously flawed and the Australian people now have a choice: this seriously flawed Labor ETS tax on everything or the coalition’s direct action. I opposed this flawed legislation.

**Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (6.31 pm)**—Climate change is a diabolical problem, because it requires both national and international action to avoid catastrophic consequences. The Economist in December last year described it as ‘the hardest political problem the world has ever had to deal with’. The bills we are debating which establish the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme are an important part of our national response to the problem. The scheme is a part of our national response, not the whole of it, and will add to the armoury of measures already adopted by the Rudd government. The CPRS established by these bills is also a scheme which until December of last year was supported by both sides of Australian politics, as was so well explained by the former leader of the opposition, the member for Wentworth, in the courageous speech he gave earlier in the day.

I want to start by addressing some remarks to the climate science, because there has been a great deal of comment and criticism of the climate science which supports the need for action. None of this criticism or comment, however, has affected the central conclusion of that science, which is that our planet is in danger if mankind does not reduce our global greenhouse gas emissions. The criticisms amount to minor nitpicking but are elevated to major status by climate change deniers and supporters of inaction. Standing back from the nitpicking, it can be seen that climate change deniers and supporters of inaction do not tackle the central
proposition of the science, which is that increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will lead to global warming and dangerous climate change. Mankind is pumping billions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, which has resulted in the last decade being the warmest on record. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2007 report concluded that, if left unabated, greenhouse gas increases would make the planet a further three degrees hotter by 2100—and possibly 4.5 to 5 degrees hotter. If the higher temperatures eventuate, the consequences could be catastrophic. These central conclusions are completely unaffected by the appearance in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s report of references to non-peer-reviewed articles or by a lack of clear support in the report for some predictions of a few particular consequences of global warming. It needs to be understood that the consequences—and the created or manufactured controversy that we have had in recent weeks about the melting of Himalayan glaciers is an example—are simply a part of a very long list of dire consequences that will be caused by global warming.

The environment of our planet and the atmosphere and oceans of our planet are complex, interconnected systems. Whether Himalayan glaciers will melt by 2050 or 2080 or 2100 is beside the point. This is but one of the possible consequences of hotter global temperatures. There are many other dangerous consequences and the vast majority of those consequences are simply not in doubt as being very probable consequences of the warming of the planet. Deniers like Ian Plimer or the former Thatcher adviser Lord Monckton, who has been spreading confusion on a recent speaking tour of Australia, never produce any serious challenge to the central thesis of the climate science, which is that increased greenhouse gases in the earth’s atmosphere caused by human activity are leading to global warming and dangerous climate change.

The action which the climate science points to is to reduce the emission of global greenhouse gases. You might think that it is not necessary to go through these arguments, because both sides of Australian politics are now committed to at least a five per cent reduction from 2000 levels by 2020. I say ‘at least’ because, while the government is committed to the five per cent reduction from 2000 levels by 2020 as a minimum and has left open the possibility of increasing the reductions target to 15 and 25 per cent depending on international action, the opposition has, it seems, drawn a line at five per cent. It is of course the case that the plan produced by the opposition last week is woefully inadequate and so it is unlikely to get anywhere near even the five per cent target.

It is also clear from the plan produced by the opposition last week that the new Leader of the Opposition is prepared to pander to the deniers. For those reasons—the inadequacy of the opposition’s plan and the apparent wish of the new opposition leader not to seriously commit but rather to pander to the deniers—we need to restate the need for action and continue to restate it. Scientists say that, if we continue on the current trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions, there is a strong risk of temperatures rising by up to five degrees by the end of this century. That will mean that Australia, which is already the hottest and driest continent in the world, will become even hotter and drier. Coastal areas will be flooded, coastal infrastructure will be destroyed, water will become scarcer and agriculture will become more marginal and more difficult, particularly for irrigated agriculture, which has thousands of jobs associated with it. The Great Barrier Reef will die, and the thousands of jobs in North Queensland that depend on the tourist industry will
vanish with it. Across the world, deserts will increase, icecaps will melt, coastal regions will suffer massive flooding and hundreds of millions, or even billions, of people will be homeless. There will be extraordinary levels of suffering and misery.

These are shocking possibilities, which we all hope will never come to pass. But the climate change deniers and those who argue for inaction or for less action cannot guarantee that these dreadful consequences will not occur. Because they do not guarantee our safety or that the science they are so keen to tear down is wrong, we must act. The only responsible course to take is the course which the science suggests—that is, to act now to reduce emissions. If the science turns out to be wrong, then the results of actions to reduce emissions will still benefit humanity and the planet. Our earth will be a cleaner and better place. We will have reduced energy consumption and our dependence on fossil fuels. We will have increased the sustainability of the world’s industries. But if, as I believe, the science is right and we have not acted as quickly and as extensively as we can, we will have condemned the planet to lasting environmental damage and humanity to immense misery.

We need to keep squarely in mind Lord Stern’s warning from 2006 that there is a cost now in reducing emissions to prevent climate change but that this cost is far, far less now than if we delay and allow emissions of greenhouse gases to continue. The cost of reducing emissions will be greater the longer we fail to act, because steeper cuts are harder to achieve. We will need to make steeper cuts in emissions the longer we wait. As well, the cost of adaptation to climate change will be greater in the future because the climate changes that we must adapt to will by that stage have become more severe.

A number of speakers in this debate have commented on the result of the Copenhagen conference in December, which was of course a disappointment to the world, because the high expectations that had been raised for a binding global agreement were not met. But the failure of international negotiators to reach a proper deal to limit greenhouse gas emissions does not alter the science. The failure is a failure of politics. It is a failure of international relations. It is not a failure of the science. The poor outcome of Copenhagen will not affect the processes which are now occurring. The fragile and thin atmosphere of our planet will continue to be damaged by greenhouse gas emissions until levels are reduced. We are all very well aware that there are already in the atmosphere, and will be for some hundreds of years, elevated levels of greenhouse gases, which already ensures that there will be a rise in the order of two degrees in global temperatures. It is for that reason that some level of dangerous climate change and global warming is already locked in. Our task as legislators, and the task of governments around the world, is to make sure that climate change and global warming are kept in check to the maximum extent possible. That is the task to which this legislation is directed.

Many of those opposite who have spoken so far in this debate seem to be happy that Copenhagen did not produce better outcomes. They should be dismayed, as I am dismayed, and work to a better outcome in Cancun in Mexico this year, because one thing that is clear is that concerted global action is necessary. Copenhagen did not meet expectations but it should not be seen as a justification for inaction. It should be seen as a spur to renew effort for a global deal. Instead of playing the political charade that effective action to reduce emissions can be achieved without cost and without substan-
tial change in some industries, we need to ask: what is the most effective action we can take nationally and globally to reduce emissions? It is not enough to commit to emissions cuts. It is not enough to promise future government spending, which is what the opposition relies on. It is not enough to rely on good intentions, particularly when what is needed is a change in corporate investment decisions. What is needed is a mechanism which creates incentives to cut emissions.

There is a broad consensus that emissions trading schemes are the most effective and lowest cost mechanism to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The report prepared for the former government by the former head of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Peter Shergold, reached that conclusion. The Garnaut review prepared for the current government reached that conclusion. The report prepared by Lord Stern for the government of the United Kingdom reached that conclusion, and the current Leader of the Opposition reached that conclusion until he perceived that some temporary political advantage was to be gained by pretending otherwise.

The international community has reached that conclusion. More than 30 countries around the world already have an emissions trading scheme, including the European Community, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Other countries are developing these schemes, including the United States, Japan and Korea. The international direction is towards agreement and consensus for emissions trading schemes, and Australia needs to be moving in the same direction.

The CPRS is the best means of doing this because it will provide a price signal to industry, to companies making long-term investment decisions. The market will set that price. One of the ironies about the current debate is that the Liberal Party and the National Party are opting for heavy government regulation, for the command and control approach, and are, it seems, against a market based solution. The carbon price will provide the incentive to move to lower emissions and at the lowest cost. This was Peter Shergold's direct conclusion in advising the former government. The opposition's solution will simply channel billions in subsidies to businesses selected by them. Very possibly, the subsidies will support an investment the businesses would have made anyway. It is a solution which means higher taxes for fewer cuts in emissions, and the Liberal and National parties should not be pretending otherwise.

Much of the commentary since the release of the opposition's inadequate plan last week has wrongly suggested that direct government spending, which the opposition relies on, is somehow an alternative to an emissions trading scheme. It is not, because we need to do both. We need a range of government spending, a range of government programs and government action, supported by an emissions trading scheme—and one could add to that a renewable energy target. The Rudd government has already acted in a range of ways. The government has acted by signing the Kyoto protocol, acted by taking part in the world efforts at Bali and Copenhagen and is now working hard on a better outcome in Mexico later this year.

The government has acted by embarking already on what the opposition choose to call direct action—by committing more than $15 billion in the last budget to a range of measures which are directed at lowering emissions. Those measures include action to improve energy efficiency in homes, shops, offices and workplaces; measures to deploy existing clean energy and low-emissions technologies; support for the creation of new clean energy and low-emissions technologies and products and opportunities for individual
action by households. Direct climate change related measures in the 2009-10 budget included the Clean Energy Initiative, which incorporates programs for low-emissions coal, solar and other renewable energy technologies, the Australian Carbon Trust and the National Strategy on Energy Efficiency.

A simple example of what the opposition would like to call direct action on climate change is the Home Insulation Program, an important part of the economic stimulus measures introduced by the government last year, which the opposition voted against. There is over $2 billion to be spent on insulating hundreds of thousands of Australian homes. Not only will this cut power bills and improve home comfort for Australian working families; it will also reduce emissions by cutting energy use. The emissions cuts produced by the Home Insulation Program have been estimated as the equivalent of taking a million cars off the road. That is the kind of direct action, to use the opposition’s term, that the Rudd government has well and truly embarked on and has been acting on since coming to office.

I will finish by saying that there are great national benefits to be gained by adopting the CPRS. It will, together with other government programs, move Australia to a low-carbon economy, an economy with far lower emissions, which is the direction the rest of the world is turning towards. I will give just a couple of examples. China has become a very large emitter of greenhouse gases, although not, of course, on a per capita basis—Australia takes the prize for very, very high emissions on a per capita basis. But China has also reached the largest installed renewable energy capacity in the world and aims to increase the share of non-fossil fuel energy in China to 15 per cent by 2020. The United Kingdom has adopted the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan, which is focusing on increasing energy efficiency, developing a smart grid, decarbonising transport and a range of other measures.

There are global opportunities for low-carbon technologies. Adopting a low-carbon policy in Australia, which the CPRS is part of, will create demand for low-carbon technologies, which will create jobs, create business opportunities and stimulate investment. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will create growth opportunities for businesses. We are all aware of the advantage that comes from being an early leader with new technology. I want to see Australia be an early leader in developing low-carbon futures, not just for this country but for the rest of the world. The renewable energy target and the CPRS are part of the solution which will move Australia to a low-carbon future. They are measures which will prompt emissions reductions. I am confident that very substantial reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases in Australia can be achieved. They can be achieved without producing substantial changes in Australian lifestyles. Many of the reduction opportunities that are presented are in fact profitable for business. (Time expired)

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (6.51 pm)—Environmental policy is one of those areas where I do not believe government can act unilaterally—that is, just making decisions without bringing the Australian public with them. The challenge of climate change cannot be solved without direct action and participation policy for the community. It was for this reason that in 2008 I held a community forum called ‘Our Patch, Our Planet’ in the electorate of Pearce so as to encourage some of the community to come and debate issues around the future of our environmental policies. The community had one message which was loud and clear. Where there was a policy to reduce carbon pollution, they wanted to be part of it. They wanted recognition for their contribution and, more importantly, they wanted leader-
ship, guidance and incentives from the federal government so that their efforts were effective, so that what they did actually counted. Instead, they got a poorly constructed, incoherent emissions trading scheme with a great emphasis on strutting the world stage and little explanation as to how the scheme would work domestically and what it would mean for individuals and business, large and small.

I suspect the reason the ETS has not been explained to the public is that the government still fails to fully understand its own scheme. Dr Alex Robson, a visiting fellow from the Crawford School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University, recently presented a paper titled ‘What does the government CPRS modelling tell us?’ analysing and commenting on the government’s paper ‘Australia’s low pollution future’. The paper set out some of the key assumptions in the modelling the government did in 2008 in preparation for the introduction of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill and cognate bills that we are debating today. Dr Robson gave an insightful paper. In particular, at the outset he made three very important points. First, the government has not modelled key aspects of its actual climate change policies. Second, the government has provided no information on some of the key economic effects of its planned emissions reduction policies, including possible effects of unemployment, interest rates and inflation. Third, and finally, the government’s own modelling results show that the present value of the cost of emissions reductions could easily exceed Australia’s entire current gross domestic product.

This analysis gives us some clue perhaps as to why the government has been unable to articulate a coherent argument in favour of its policy, except a mantra that we had to go to Copenhagen with a settled position and legislation passed through this parliament no matter what the cost. How can the government expect the public to have faith in this ETS when it has failed to produce modelling on the key economic effects of measures outlined in this bill? A survey in my electorate has shown that the public are very keen to see us do something about reducing our carbon footprint. But, in order to instil public confidence, the government has to lay everything out very clearly so that people can understand what they are being asked to sign up to. I do not think this has happened. It is very sad really to have bungled so comprehensively this important policy matter. It really is an indictment of the current government and, importantly, it seriously sets back the plans to reduce Australia’s carbon emissions.

I have spoken often on these and related bills over the past several years and accept the science, notwithstanding some of the more fantastic claims from sceptics and some mistakes in ICCP reports that are now being corrected and addressed. It is concerning that impetus for global action has stalled and that the public feels sceptical about aspects of the science. But this in no way absolves us as responsible members of this parliament from acting in a way that cuts through some of those more fantastic claims and to ensure that we risk manage for the future.

Although Australia is one of the largest emitters per head of population, the fact is that Australia’s contribution to CO2 emissions is around 1.4 per cent. Without a significant commitment by other developed and developing countries, we cannot unilaterally take action on our own continent that will resolve the looming problems on the planet. While we should make a contribution to reducing the output of CO2, it is very hard to see the point of the government’s unseemly haste to push this particular legislation that we are debating today through this parlia-
ment for a second time when it has failed to coherently articulate the policy to the Australian people. My experience is that people are reasonable. As I said, a survey of my electorate shows that people want something to be done, but they are very wary of what is being offered at the present time by the government.

There have been fantastic claims, as I said, on both sides of this debate. Surely, in the interests of public confidence in the policy direction, the government does owe it to the nation to fully model all aspects of the policy in terms of its impact on the community and to improve its articulation of the policy in the public domain domestically. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Warringah, and the shadow minister, the member for Flinders, have proposed a direct action policy that does make a good start to doing more than churn large sums of money made from permits into compensation papers. It is a policy that reflects the community’s concerns and provides the vital framework in which people can make a direct contribution to reducing greenhouse emissions. This is a policy that recognises community engagement as a priority rather than as a favour to the community. The direct action proposed by the coalition has the capability of achieving the five per cent target at a lower cost to the community. It provides direct incentives to reduce CO2 emissions without the immediate flow-on effect of Labor’s legislation.

Most importantly, the coalition policy provides incentives for individuals as well as families, businesses and industries to take direct action to reduce carbon emissions. The coalition will introduce a $2.5 billion emissions reduction fund to support carbon reduction and the fund will direct CO2 emissions reduction activities through to 2020 by providing incentives to businesses to reach the target of reduced carbon emissions by five per cent by 2020, the same as the government’s target, without the cost burden and the complexity. As I said, it is enormously important that governments recognise the need to clearly articulate the policy, explain it to the community, be upfront about its impact and bring the public along with them on this important journey to reduce carbon and to improve our quality of life globally.

The fund that the coalition is setting up will provide a reduction in CO2 emissions and practical environmental benefits, while protecting the community from massive increases in costs and possible job losses. Again, the impact on jobs has not been adequately modelled. The coalition’s emission reduction fund will use the existing national greenhouse gas and energy reporting scheme, which was introduced into this House by the Howard government, to determine proposed emission reductions beyond the base levels which have already been established for individual firms. Businesses that reduce emissions below their individual baseline will be able to offer the CO2 abatement for sale to the government. This means that there is a direct financial incentive for businesses to take direct action to reduce their carbon footprint. This is an efficient market based policy. There is no doubt that the market has an important role to play. In the future we may find that there is a place for an even greater market role, but the effectiveness of the large-scale market approach is limited until such a time as the community comes on board with it and accepts it.

The coalition’s proposed fund will support a range of other measures to abate carbon, including replenishment of soil and farmland; the replacement of old, inefficient power stations; a $40 million investment in the development of clean energy hubs to drive clean energy research and development for the future; and the planting of 20 million trees by 2020, with a commitment to a green
army to assist with the delivery of this program. Importantly, the coalition’s policy direction includes a strong emphasis on a new solar sunrise for Australia, one of our greatest natural resources—and we do not make the most of it. We see countries like Germany developing whole industries around solar, and they do not have the natural advantages that we have in this country. The new solar sunrise for Australia includes a million additional solar roofs by 2020 through an additional $1,000 rebate for either solar panels or solar hot water systems and has a $100 million solar towns and schools initiative so that whole communities can contribute. There will be $50 million invested in a geothermal and tidal towns initiative. The program will commit to a study of high-voltage underground cabling to support renewable energy delivery.

Labor has chosen, by contrast, to rely on its high-taxing, complicated merry-go-round of money and a direct action policy that frankly is a shambles. That, again, is a great shame. The integrity of the direct action policies put into place by the government is in question, yet they have a lot of merit and should be done. Those programs have the capability to reduce CO2 emissions. Rather than engaging the community, this government has further alienated people through dismal management and chaotic delivery of its direct action programs. The three key government initiatives designed to engage the community—the solar credits scheme, the insulation rebate scheme and the Green Loans scheme—are all now lying in tatters. After a series of scandals, these programs have wasted millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money and have resulted in mass community disillusionment and scepticism. Sadly, what it has meant is that they have not achieved their potential, which is not good for any of us. First we had the chopping and changing of the solar panel rebate, leaving industry and consumers confused and many out of pocket. Next came the very serious allegations of the rorting of the insulation rebate scheme, now subject to inquiry. We now know that the management of this program was so negligent that many houses across Australia are at risk of electrical fires due to improper installation and quite probably are not saving as much energy, because of the shoddy way in which some of that work was carried out.

But the epitome of mismanagement comes from the Green Loans Program that was expected to run until 2012 but now looks like running out of money by April. The minister says this is testament to the program’s success, but the thousands of Australians who invested $4,000 in training and accreditation to become a green loans assessor who now find themselves without work might say otherwise. The government capped the number of assessments but not the number of assessors and now faces the prospect of a class action from disgruntled assessors who claim to have been misled about their training and job prospects. Again, it is just not good for the environment and it is not good for any of us. It does not help us to take the important steps to reduce our carbon footprint. While there is a glut of assessors, the Green Loans process has been further hampered by the inefficient processing of applications for assessments and loans. I have been contacted by a number of constituents with serious concerns as to the administration of the program, which has hampered their efforts to reduce household carbon emissions. These cases, of course, I have referred to the minister, and I would hope that they will be sorted so that this program can do what it was intended to do, which in intent is noble.

The capacity to reduce our carbon footprint in the future will rely undoubtedly on every individual playing a part. We have all contributed to the problem of environmental
degradation and we all need to play a part to change the way we live our lives and the way we do business. Many Australian businesses and individuals have been taking steps for some time to reduce carbon emissions, but ongoing meaningful change cannot take place unless there is full community engagement and everyone is equipped to play their part. There is so much more we could do with regard to new vehicle emissions, urban planning, public transport, house design and even in the area—just the single step—of the way we consume packaging could have a very significant impact on the environment and on our greenhouse gas emissions.

These are other areas where direct action could really benefit the community in reducing our reliance on traditional forms of energy, reducing the cost of living and improving our environment overall. I am at a loss to know why we do not have the sort of leadership we should have in some of these areas which we do not seem to have done much about at all—they have been barely touched on.

Igniting the community consciousness and engaging individuals through reputable programs and transparent modelling is an essential element for any Australian environmental policy. It is not enough for government to establish a huge bureaucracy, and to expect the public’s support for a scheme that not even the government seems to understand, especially when some households stand to lose $950 from their budgets each year under this scheme. It really is important that if government wants the cooperation of the people that it comes clean, that it explains the policy, that it outlines the implications of that policy and does everything to ask the public to come on that journey as well.

The tendency, though, to ignore the real cost of doing business in Australia—and, in fact, globally—and not factoring in clean-up costs means that I think we are all living in a fool’s paradise. To think that we can keep digging material out of the ground, we can keep manufacturing and doing all of the other things that we do without factoring in the real cost of what we are doing means we are just kidding ourselves. We need to really think about that quite a bit. Also, the convention that our economic wellbeing must continue to rest on industrial and commercial practices that have historically led to environmental degradation must be urgently rethought and reviewed. There are new ways of doing things. We do have very innovative people and we can change for the good of the whole of the nation and, indeed, for the global good.

But if we are to meet the considerable challenge of climate change the action ultimately has to come from individual efforts on a global scale, and it will demand a financial investment—there are no two ways about it—as well as one of human ingenuity and human effort. We are all in this together and the time has passed, really, to debate the core elements of the science but to move forward with a carbon reduction scheme that all Australians can feel confident in, can embrace and can participate in so that we make a genuine effort to reduce our carbon footprint.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (7.11 pm)—I rise to speak on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related bills. In doing so, I highlight the importance of these particular measures in my own seat of Corangamite. They are also very significant nationally and globally.

I would like to start by formally putting on the record my thanks to Minister Penny Wong for her tireless efforts in calibrating these bills to meet the needs of working families and their employers. The minister
has put together what I believe to be a fantastic package that will enable us to counteract the worst aspects of climate change through these particular measures. Of course, it has been an epic and incredibly difficult task that the minister has undertaken. I believe she has done it in a first-class way.

I want to add some clear and unequivocal statements to those I made before Christmas. These statements will be judged in our electorates and in my electorate of Corangamite—it is important that we all recognise this. Not that long ago the current opposition leader described climate change as crap. I actually believe in the science; I believe action on climate change is a necessity in my electorate of Corangamite. I believe the Leader of the Opposition is an embarrassment to this parliament. He starts with the argument that climate change, in his view, is crap. Then he goes on to present a policy that I believe does not deliver in any way whatsoever any emissions reductions. He then puts those costs onto Australian families through taxation and our normal government arrangements for raising revenue.

As I said earlier, I believe climate change is real. I believe the science is real. I believe people and industry have contributed very substantially to climate change. I believe Australia, as a country, has, proportionally, one of the highest carbon footprints anywhere in the world. And, as a consequence, I believe we have a moral responsibility to lead the debate on carbon pollution reduction and take the necessary steps to achieve that. We have a responsibility to help rectify the damage that we have all done. We have a responsibility to our future generations. We have a responsibility to take the necessary steps to reduce our carbon pollution. We have a responsibility to other nations on this planet. We have a responsibility to lead, and that is what I believe these bills will do. I believe that advanced countries like Australia have a moral responsibility to lead on climate change.

Corangamite, my own seat, faces some very substantial risks. Corangamite has hundreds of kilometres bordering the ocean. We have the Great Ocean Road. The Great Ocean Road links coastal community to coastal community, and was built by 3,000 servicemen who had returned from the First World War. Modelling shows that sea level rise driven by climate change will see the Great Ocean Road breached in place after place. Other parts of my seat, such as the Bellarine Peninsula, Queenscliff, Ocean Grove and Point Lonsdale, also face very significant inundation challenges if we do not meet the challenges of climate change.

In addition to that, we also have some very significant environmental places within my seat, such as the Otway Ranges, the lakes district in western Victoria and our magnificent volcanic plains. These assets now are at far greater risk due to fire, and over the last 10 years we have seen a large number of those lakes drying because of drought. And we do know that climate change will lead to further periods of dryness and drought. Our flora and fauna and our people are also at further risk due to climate change.

In Corangamite we have a very substantial farming community. The farming communities now face very significant challenges because of climate change and drought. Less rain is posing enormous challenges to our farmers and our farming communities. The CPRS will allow farmers to generate additional income. It will enable farmers to take meaningful steps in producing an income that will be good for our environment and good for their families. I think this is very significant and good news for our farmers. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party wants to take away from farmers this opportunity to derive additional income for their families.
The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists reported that the Leader of the Opposition’s con job would cost farmers. Farmers in my electorate do not need any more costs imposed on them. They need ways in which they can generate sustainable income and make a difference. The Labor government’s CPRS will deliver new income streams for farmers.

The minister and the whole Rudd government are aware of the need to protect jobs in dealing with climate change. Farming jobs, the jobs of Alcoa workers, the jobs of Shell workers and the jobs of the cement industry workers in my electorate are all very important. The Rudd government’s CPRS is carefully calibrated to protect their jobs so that they can continue to participate in a low carbon economy with a lower carbon footprint.

We also need to make sure that we have a vibrant tourism industry, particularly of course in my seat of Corangamite. Climate change is one of the biggest risks to the tourism industry in my region. It is the primary reason why we have to act. The consequences of Black Saturday are only just becoming clearer for the tourism industry, particularly as areas like the Otway national park become more threatened by wildfire events because of climate change.

If we compare that to Abbott’s con job, the government has got the balance right. We have recognised in this legislation that there are trade-exposed industries. We have recognised the need for industry transition. And we are providing the industry assistance that is required and the time which is required for them to be able to participate. These bills balance the overriding need to act on climate change with the need to put in place the mechanisms that will allow our industries to adjust to a lower carbon footprint. Unlike the Liberal Party’s con job, we have thorough policy that will help to lead us through the challenge of climate change. My region, the greater Geelong region, is showing leadership on climate change. We are providing certainty through the mechanisms in this bill. A world carbon market is inevitable and it will be created. We are readying our country with some well-calibrated legislation—legislation that will future-proof us. This bill has clear aims and clear targets—unlike the opposition leader’s con job. The government’s commitment on targets is an unconditional commitment to reduce our carbon pollution by five per cent by 2020.

This is the most important legislation that this parliament will have to deal with. This is about how we turn around the terrible legacy that unfettered carbon pollution has left us—a legacy that now threatens to engulf island nations within our Asia-Pacific region through sea level rise; that threatens to decimate biodiversity; that is threatening human life, creating fire, storm and flooding events of unprecedented ferocity and scale; and that will leave future generations the question of why we have not acted in this place.

On the other side of the chamber, of course, we only see a policy con job. Their policy is nothing short of a joke. Their policy will not cut emissions. Their policy will cost Australian families. I urge those members on the other side that get the need to act on climate change to support these bills. Stand up for what you know is right. These are defining bills. These will be the bills that future parliaments will judge this parliament on.

As I have said before, I am very proud of the efforts that Minister Wong and this government have gone to to get the balance right. We are now a world away from the shameful Howard years. We cannot let policy con jobs continue to set our climate change
debate. This is Australia saying we are up for the challenge. This is Australia saying we will act. This is Australia saying we are leaders on climate change policy. For those reasons, I commend these bills to the House.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (7.24 pm)—This is now the third time that I have spoken on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation, and I welcome the opportunity—in the debate on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and cognate bills—once again to call the Labor government scheme what it really is: a great, huge new tax. As I have mentioned in my previous speeches, an effective and responsible approach to tackling climate change is needed, and that is exactly what the coalition has proposed. We will support and encourage direct action, unlike the great big new tax put forward three times by the Prime Minister, which will cost jobs, drive up inflation, inhibit business growth and investment and hit household budgets.

The government’s motives are purely political; we know that. Australia accounts for only 1.4 per cent of the world’s CO2 emissions and is one of only a handful of countries meeting their Kyoto targets. Just to put this in perspective, both the government’s plan and the coalition’s plan will cut emissions by five per cent. For $40 billion, though, the government will reduce Australia’s contribution to global emissions from 1.4 per cent to 1.3309 per cent, cutting our contribution by only 0.07 per cent, not a wise investment when you consider that the coalition can achieve the same result for a fraction of the price—in fact, less than 10 per cent of the price, at $3.2 billion.

Mr Rudd wanted to lock Australia into this reckless scheme before Copenhagen. Australia should breathe a sigh of relief and look at how that turned out. If Mr Rudd had had his way, households would be feeling the pain of an ETS when there is clearly no global consensus and most likely never will be. It is true that per capita Australia is one of the higher emitters, but it should not be surprising; we have a strong manufacturing and industrial sector, we are a strong economy and of course we can expect to have higher emissions than, say, Third World countries such as Burma.

This plan is the equivalent of raising the GST by almost three per cent, creating an enormous government slush fund. It will have the same history as the petrol parity pricing scheme, which was introduced in 1977 because of an apparent oil shortage and which aimed to ensure further exploration and ensure supplies. But, in reality, such schemes do not create a culture of investment but a huge government money pit, massive revenues that are administered by a huge government bureaucracy. Governments never give all the money back; they skim and use it for their own purposes. In the case of parity pricing, they now treat that as revenue.

Labor’s ETS would hurt exactly those people Mr Rudd centred his election strategy on during the 2007 election campaign, the working families. In fact, you do not hear him talking about working families much these days because he has put so many out of work. They have every right to feel betrayed by the Prime Minister, who vigorously pursues his plan to drive up the cost of living. There is no finite figure on Labor’s action. There are no answers as to how much costs really could go up on everyday items like bread and milk. We at least know that electricity would soar by almost 20 per cent, a horrifying reality for ordinary Australians who are already burdened by a 15 per cent price hike this year and are facing the prospect of more.

Evidence shows that a working couple earning $140,000 with two or three depend-
ent kids would be $620 worse off under the ETS. These figures get worse. Single-income families bringing in $120,000 would be $950 worse off every year. Labor said they would give the money back. Compensation which the government cannot exactly explain or calculate will be of no comfort to the 120,000 workers in regional Australia who will lose their jobs. There are no answers to the most basic questions. The Minister for Ageing cannot detail the impact on a pensioner’s costs of living, and the small business minister laughed off a genuine question about electricity costs for dairy farmers.

Not even those opposite trying to sell the scheme to the Australian public understand it. Mr Rudd continues to say, ‘Well, it’s very complex.’ Every time he gets bogged down on a figure or an explanation, he says, ‘Oh, but it’s complex.’ He is basically saying, ‘Well, you wouldn’t understand; I understand because I’m quite intelligent, but you wouldn’t understand because it is so complex.’ There are no answers to the most basic questions, as I said. The feeling in the electorate is one of frustration. People want to do their bit for the environment, but they do not want to get slugged with a massive tax that will have little impact on the environment and will ship their jobs and emissions overseas.

Let us put it into perspective. Labor’s plan allows polluters to pay to pollute. This tax that they want to put on industry will not reduce carbon in the atmosphere by one tonne. They will say, ‘Well, the incentive is that, if we charge them all this extra money, they’ll stop their emissions.’ These are the people, as we continually hear, that keep the lights on, and they are not going to stop keeping the lights on; they are just going to pass the costs on. So, at the end of the day, this supposedly so complex program that the Prime Minister wants to introduce is not complex at all; it is just going to make the polluters pay to pollute.

While the rest of the world changes its tune, our own Prime Minister pursues his massive tax. The Canadian Prime Minister is on the record as saying that developing technology is the answer, not setting targets. United States President Barack Obama has backed away from a cap-and-trade scheme and is considering direct action similar to that which the coalition is planning. Perhaps when President Obama comes to Australia next month he might persuade Prime Minister Rudd to his way of thinking during his visit—though I doubt it. The world’s biggest emitters—the United States, China, Japan, India and Russia—do not have emissions trading schemes.

As Christian Kerr reported in the Australian this week, New Zealand is the only country outside of the EU to adopt what is essentially a carbon tax, plunging New Zealanders, whose emissions reductions will make no difference on a global scale, into debt as fuel prices rise by at least 3.5¢ a litre and electricity costs soar. I think it is a conservative estimate by the New Zealand government that the average household will only be $165 a year worse off compared to the figures I have just told you about with ours. Interestingly, that was brought in by the previous Labour government in New Zealand and has not been enacted to this date by the current government. They have backed away from it as well. Why wouldn’t they? The rest of the world is not doing it. The biggest emitters are not doing it. They do not even want to commit to it. They saw what happened in Copenhagen: the Chinese stared down the rest of the world on a whole range of issues and our Prime Minister was left outside in the cold trying to look useful.

The best place to start on this issue is at home. Our policy is one of practical and
cost-effective measures that will reduce emissions by the same five per cent by 2020 proposed by the government but, as I have already outlined, at a fraction of the price. Obviously this is a no-brainer. Why would any government choose a massive tax and cost to jobs when the same outcomes can be achieved more cheaply and efficiently? One can only surmise that the $120 billion slush fund is too much to turn down for a government that loves to squander money. The coalition aims to look after the Australian environment first, and in doing so will focus on its natural resources: soil and sun.

I recently met with Justin Byatt, a family poultry farmer from my electorate, about a company called Agriboost. Agriboost is an organisation newly established to investigate the alternative uses of chicken manure, which has focused on power generation to date. But Agriboost plans to move forward and develop other opportunities. It intends to form partnerships with the soil amendment industry and to apply new technologies, including biochar to broiler waste, to improve soil quality and fertility. Farming is the backbone of the Australian industry so there is no better place to start than encouraging farmers to use soil carbon measures. This is real, direct action by industry.

Australia’s hot, dry climate makes it an ideal candidate for solar power. With less than one per cent of power currently coming from solar energy we can—and should—do better. We will invest in solar panels for one million Australian roofs by 2020. I repeat: one million roofs around Australia could have solar panels on them. Local residents will welcome the $1,000 rebate for either solar panels or solar hot water systems. As I drive around my electorate it is abundantly clear that most houses have a TV aerial or a satellite dish on them. There is plenty of room on these roofs for solar panels, which will reduce the energy used and feed power back into the grid. Can you imagine, during a hot time in summer in Perth, when we have brownouts and blackouts because of the huge draw on the power stations through air conditioners going during the 43-degree days which we have had recently, that this would not happen if we had most of the roofs on the houses and on the industrial estates of Western Australia feeding a massive amount of electricity back into the grid on these hot days? It is only sensible, but too sensible for the government to take on board. It is probably too simple. Simple inventions are generally the best. Sliced bread was simple but it was one of the best things that we have come across.

Further, the green army will plant an astonishing 20 million trees by 2020 to re-establish urban forests and green corridors and to support large-scale renewable energy generation and emerging technologies. The coalition is serious about making a real difference, not symbolic gestures. We have to encourage business and families to make a change, rather than taxing them for doing it. We are into incentives; they are into taxing them. Our reward based approach could be as simple as planting more trees, or more elaborate technology advances for bigger businesses.

I read with interest an article in the Australian Financial Review last November about the Mountaineer coal plant in West Virginia and its massive experiment in clean coal. It aims to be the first to capture the fugitive emissions of a fully operational coal plant. The Mountaineer plant generates enough electricity to power a small city but in turn emits eight million tonnes of CO2 emissions a year. Its sequestering of carbon underground is an expensive pilot on a massive scale. Projects like this support local jobs and result in real advances, not massive taxes. In Australia we have the Maitland plant working on clean coal technology. This
is just another example of real action on our own shores, considering Australia gets about 80 per cent of its energy from coal.

Direct action is a responsible and proactive approach to keeping local jobs and the local economy strong, and it is supported by industry. Canning is home to Alcoa, BHP and Newmont, who make up the largest individual employers in my electorate. With BHP’s Worsley Alumina having a capacity of four million tonnes annually, it is BHP’s biggest carbon emitter in Australia, and a reckless scheme would cost many local jobs. There has been a $3.5 billion investment in the Boddington goldmine, which I attended last week when it was officially opened by the Premier. It will be the largest goldmine in Australia and will be bigger than the Kalgoorlie Super Pit. It will support around 1,000 local jobs and produce about a million ounces of gold a year. Mr Rudd wants to risk these jobs with this scheme of his—this penalty on industry.

I expect that local governments and schools will take up the coalition’s million roofs initiative. The City of Mandurah in my electorate has already installed a 2.1 kilowatt solar photovoltaic system on the roof of the Falcon e-library that generates around 3,720 kilowatts of electricity and saves approximately four tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions every year. Similar projects will be embraced throughout Canning. It is all part of the direct action needed at the grassroots level to make a difference. Imagine what a million roofs and solar cities would do. That is what I really call direct action.

Scare campaigns about climate change have been well fronted, but there is a growing shift, and despite this the Prime Minister remains adamant about locking Australia into a plan that could be based on suspect data. There is no doubt in the world that since Copenhagen there has been a shift on this whole issue not only internationally but also in Australia. We have seen that even in the latest Nielsen poll today. At a local level, I have people coming to me, emailing me and writing to me when they did not come to me before, saying, ‘Don’t allow us to get sucked into this; don’t allow us to have this as a millstone around our necks forever.’

So what is really causing global warming? Is it really carbon emissions or is it something else? In his book *The Real Global Warming Disaster*, Christopher Booker contends that, rather than the apocalyptic scenarios promised by Al Gore, the real disaster of global warming will be the strangulation of the world economy by measures imposed by governments around the world based on false information. Eminent academics offer some persuasive arguments about the science and truth behind global warming. Even the head of the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is under fire now. We know that Rajendra Pachauri’s credibility is under attack after the IPCC inaccurately claimed that the Himalayan glaciers would melt by 2035 if nothing were done about climate change. He was outed.

I have spoken with prominent scientists and recently met with climate change experts Joanne Nova and David Evans, who maintain that the climate change alarm is founded on information that is fundamentally flawed. In the last 100 years the climate has warmed only about 0.7 degrees. In fact, in the last decade the climate, some say, has cooled. In periods throughout history there have been warm spells—none warmer than the medieval period. Long-term weather forecasts are impossibly inaccurate; as experts say, a forecast for 30 or 40 years in the future is not a forecast.

No-one can deny that global carbon emissions have risen with industrial growth since the First World War. Carbon is reportedly at...
higher levels than at any time in the last 650,000 years. But, if you accept the fact that the planet has not warmed dramatically during a time when carbon emissions have peaked, the conclusion is that our emissions may not be responsible for the warming of the planet. Dr David Evans says that the shift in views came in 1999 and by 2007:

… the evidence was pretty conclusive that carbon played only a minor role and was not the main cause of the recent global warming. As Lord Keynes famously said, “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”

In the last 20 years, the world has spent $50 billion on global warming research and has not found hard evidence that carbon emissions cause global warming. Joanne Nova puts it simply:

Everything hinges on this one question. If carbon dioxide is not a significant cause, then carbon sequestration, cap-and-trade, emissions trading, and the Kyoto agreement are a waste of time and money.

Hoping for a good outcome while acting on something for all of the wrong reasons is called policy-by-accident.

I am by no means an expert, but the reality is that there is conjecture about what really causes the planet to continue to warm. Despite this, the Prime Minister remains gung-ho about locking Australia into a scheme which will have no impact on global emissions, will cost Australians dearly in jobs and income and will send the pollution offshore.

Can you imagine if something like Alcoa in my electorate were to be penalised as this system would do to them? They would quite easily go to somewhere like Indonesia, which does not have the same rigorous checks and balances on emissions. First of all, we would export our jobs. Secondly, we would export our incomes through the aluminium produced and the taxes that the workers would be paying as they earned.

Worse than that, we would export the pollution, because the Indonesians, as I said, do not have the same rigour in their environmental assessments. As a result, this exporting of pollution into a country which does not have to comply, because countries like Indonesia are called ‘developing countries’ and do not have the same obligations, is quite irresponsible for Australia to do.

The former head of the National Climate Change Centre, William Kininmonth, said last year that the basis of the Rudd scheme is:

… an unsustainable hypothesis that dangerous global warming will be an outcome of continued burning of fossil fuels …

Yes, we need to look after the environment and explore alternative energies. But the point is that we may not have all the answers about climate change, and should that not be enough to take the direct action that avoids economic suicide for Australia? The choice is clear and the public is starting to realise this. It is not so complex, Prime Minister Rudd. The public now are starting to understand that we have a solution of direct action. We do things by recharging our soils. We are going to have a program of planting more trees. We will have a million solar roofs around Australia putting electricity back in. The Labor Party just wants to give us a great big tax and not reduce one tonne of carbon in our atmosphere.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (7.43 pm)—I say at the outset that I have no intention tonight of making a contribution arguing the science of climate change. I am not going to get into whether or not the globe is warming or, indeed, whether humans are making a contribution to that warming. As far as Parliament House is concerned, that debate has been had. It has come to some conclusions. No major party in this place believes now that action is not required on climate
change—not the Labor Party, not the Liberal Party and certainly not the Greens.

So there is no doubt that government action now is inevitable. But let us go back one step. Major parties in this place agree that there is a problem and action is required. The next question is this: is this action a priority for an Australian government or are there bigger and greater priorities for the government of the day at this point in time? We know that the Leader of the Opposition believes it is a priority because he now has a plan to spend some $3 billion of taxpayers’ money on his so-called direct action method. We know the government certainly has a plan. We know the government places a high priority on the need to act on climate change, and it is that plan we are debating for a third time this evening and no doubt will be debating for a little while yet.

So we know the pollies have come to a conclusion. The question then is: are the pollies right? I think it is fair to say, based on the polls, that the politicians are reflecting a broader community view. All the opinion polls tell us that the majority of Australians want their government to act on climate change. Even my electorate of Hunter is an electorate in which I believe the majority of people want the government to act on climate change. Even my electorate of Hunter is an electorate in which I believe the majority of people want the government to act on climate change. It is well known in this place that my electorate is one very relevant to this debate this evening, an electorate in which the coalmining, power generation and aluminium-smelting sectors are very, very prominent. If this debate had been taking place five years ago, I am not sure I would have been able to stand here claiming that a majority of people in my electorate supported government action on climate change, but there has been a big shift in my electorate in recent years. I will share a few anecdotes.

A few years ago a coalmining company was proposing a new coalmine, the Anvil Hill mine, in part of my electorate. At the site where the Anvil Hill mine was proposed, we had a protest action that people described as a picket line—not quite the correct description but it will do. Standing on the picket line on a regular basis were Hunter coalminers, people then currently employed in the coalmining industry, protesting against this mine and its potential environmental effects.

I remember once being asked by one of our major newspapers whether I could organise a photograph of a third generation mining family, a family in which grandfather, father and son had been involved in the mining industry. That newspaper wanted to run this picture as a way of portraying what might be the threats to coalminers in electorates like mine. I could not find one, because coalminers I talked to did not really feel comfortable about associating themselves with an all-out attack on the idea of addressing climate change. They wanted to go with the majority. They understood—the third generation person was the guy I was turning talking to—that times had changed and it was past time that governments started doing something about the environment generally but climate change in particular and all its threats.

The coalmining union in my electorate was well ahead of the Labor Party on this issue, long before the party advocated the emissions trading scheme or at least some carbon constraint, notwithstanding the potential impact on coalmining, because the coalmining union believed that there was no future for coalmining in the long term if the industry did not act to become more sustainable.

So there are big changes in electorates like mine, partly of course driven by demographic change. Younger people tend to be more conscious of environmental concerns than older Australians are. As those younger people continue to wash into the system, atti-
tudes change. So, for all these good reasons, government has decided to act.

I said I did not want to argue the science, because there is a general consensus in this place in any case that the risks are too great not to act. There are plenty of scientists who will tell us that global warming is not real and certainly man’s contribution is not a factor. But I am a great believer in the precautionary principle: if in doubt, act. Australians spend about $3 billion on household insurance every year, mainly to cover them for unlikely but catastrophic events like fire. I do not know what the percentages are, but I suspect that in the broader scheme of things very few houses in Australia burn down each year. But Australians decide to spend that $3 billion or so each year in aggregate because they know it is a small price to pay given the enormous impact a fire could have on them, their family and their family’s future.

What are the risks in the broader sense when we talk about climate change? They are drought, heatwaves, storms, cyclones and rising sea levels, to name a few. Under some scenarios, the consequences could extend right to competition amongst people for water, food and other resources. For some island states, including those in the South Pacific, we know the threat is potentially existential.

It is clear that the parliament and the Australian people have come to the conclusion that the risks are too great to sit back and do nothing. So what do we do? In just under four weeks time, I will have been in this place for some 14 years, as is the case with my comrade from the opposition sitting at the table, the member for Dunkley. My staff advise me that this is my 417th speech in this place. Few debates over that long period of time and during my many contributions in this place have been more important than the debate we are having this evening. But, in addition to that, never in those 14 years have I seen such political opportunism from an opposition. That might be a big statement, but I have seen political opportunism in this place, on a regular basis, from those flying all sorts of colours. I saw it in the mid-1990s, when the then Labor opposition opposed the GST. In hindsight, I think that was a questionable decision. Labor saw a political opportunity and exploited it. There were some differences, of course. The biggest difference of all was that the majority of Labor MPs held strong convictions. Many of them, if not the majority of them, did not accept that the GST could be introduced without having an adverse impact on their largely working-class constituencies. I concede that the GST, a broad based consumption tax, had become a necessary and inevitable thing for Australia, but strong convictions and beliefs were held.

By contrast, this is highly doubtful on the other side of politics. We certainly know that, in the recent leadership ballot, the overwhelming majority of MPs voted for a candidate who was dedicated to taking action on climate change. They were committed not to ‘direct action’, as the now Leader of the Opposition calls it, but to some form of carbon constraint or, more likely, some form of market based mechanism. We know that the majority of those on the opposition benches who have spoken today are not speaking genuinely but are on the path to political opportunism.

We also know that there is a difference because the opposition, having negotiated with the government, last year agreed to support the CPRS, agreed to support the government’s approach to addressing climate change. To his great credit, the member for Wentworth was in here today standing by his commitment to the government, standing by the deal he struck with the government, standing here arguing for an ETS and mak-
ing it clear to the parliament that he will stand by that deal all the way to crossing the floor in this place. All credit goes to him for doing so. And then we had the member for Warringah. Of course, Tony Abbott knows a political opportunity when he sees one. On many occasions he has demonstrated a willingness to exploit an opportunity when it comes along, and he is certainly grabbing the opportunity with both hands in this case.

But there is another big difference between what Labor did on the GST back in the mid-1990s and what the opposition are doing today. The risks involved here are much different. The risk of a GST not going through did have some medium- to long-term effects. As I said, there was an inevitable shift to a broad based consumption tax as the wholesale tax base narrowed and our services sector grew. But the risk in this case extends to all those things I mentioned earlier, including the existential threat for small island communities, and creates enormous uncertainty for Australian businesses. At least Labor was consistent with the GST, which is something we certainly have not seen from the opposition benches on the question of the CPRS.

We know that the Libs support carbon constraint. There can be no doubt about that. The Liberal Party have a history of support for the free market and for market responses, and I acknowledge that. Certainly in recent decades that has been the position of the Liberal Party. It has not always been the case. If you go back a bit further, they were very strongly under the influence of the National Party. But in the last two or three decades the Liberal Party have been pretty committed to the market and to market responses and to allowing the market to deal with these issues. So it defies belief that the Liberal Party, having acknowledged that there is a need to act on climate change, now believe that this direct action fiasco is the right path, as opposed to a market based mechanism. I do not believe that for a minute. John Howard believed in a market based mechanism. We know that the member for Flinders believes in a market based mechanism. He said so in a thesis he wrote as a university student. Peter Shergold, who did John Howard’s work for him, believed in a market based mechanism. And so do I—I want to make that clear.

So what is this market mechanism? This is where this debate is confusing for the Australian public. They are still wondering what this is all about. The opposition’s decision to belatedly run interference on the CPRS is making the government’s task of communicating that message and explaining the CPRS to the Australian people all the more difficult. For all its complexities, the scheme is really pretty simple. It is complex when you get down to the detail, but at the end of the day it is all pretty simple. The CPRS—or an ETS—is all about putting a cap on the amount of pollution that businesses can emit. In this case, we are talking about 1,000 businesses out of many millions of businesses in this country—for example, power stations, aluminium smelters and fuel refiners. If they cannot stay within that cap, they pay a penalty or have to buy additional emissions permits. That is the basic thrust of the thing. Simplifying it over the longer term as we emerge—that is the system.

Business can do three things. It can absorb the costs into its profit margin, or its bottom line; it can find ways to reduce its emissions; or of course it can pass the cost of that burden onto the consumer. We all welcome the fact that, in a competitive economy, passing it on is not that easy. Certainly absorbing it into the bottom line is not a good option for business. This is about the other option, and that is helping business to reduce its emissions. The extent to which business will pass on the costs we think will be between one
and 1.5 per cent in inflationary terms, and of course the government will compensate consumers for that change. The tables are there for all to see on the government’s website. Any family, any individual, can go into those cameos and work out exactly how they will be affected by the CPRS and the extent to which they will be compensated.

We are also helping business in the transition. Energy intensive trade exposed industries will get massive amounts of assistance to help them through the transitional period. Indeed, all the revenue the government raises under the CPRS goes back to compensation—compensating people, compensating families, compensating businesses through the transition period. The opposition mischievously describes the ETS as a tax. It is not a tax; it is a charge on heavy polluters and it is an incentive for them to drive their emissions down, and of course the revenue from that charge will be used to compensate businesses and families, as I suggested. The government’s CPRS package extends well beyond an ETS. We are heavily investing in the renewables sector and other low-emissions technologies. We are investing heavily on the demand side, helping Australian households reduce their energy consumption, reducing demand on that side of the equation.

When it is all said and done, for all its complexities in the detail, it is a pretty simple proposition. It is the most efficient way of dealing with the challenges we collectively face. It is time the opposition put its political opportunism aside and worked with the government on these issues. The government has demonstrated in the past a preparedness to talk and to negotiate. That is why we are dealing with CPRS mark two. I have no doubt that, to get these very important matters through the parliament, the government is prepared to talk further. But it is absolutely apparent that Tony Abbott, having gone completely in the other direction with his so-called direct action plan, has no intention of indulging in any more talk. The member for Warringah, the Leader of the Opposition, has no intention of further negotiating on the CPRS, because the Leader of the Opposition has one thing in mind and one thing only, and that is the 2010 election.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (8.03 pm)—The member for Hunter is someone with whom I have a friendship and for whom I feel some fondness, and I felt uneasy as he struggled to come to terms with what is actually before the parliament today. He followed the tradition of all the Labor speakers on this Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill and distinctly avoided what is actually in the bill. We did not hear any defence of the policy approach. We did not hear any explanation of the policy settings within the bill and the way they have been calibrated or how in fact this bill may actually achieve the goal that it states it aims to achieve. You do not hear any of that. You do not hear any of those Labor members come into this parliament to debate their so-called Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill and actually discuss the bill. What you get instead is a rich ensemble of platitudes and distractions and false debates, where they describe what the opposition is trying to achieve in a most inaccurate and disparaging way and then seek to have a go at it, without actually turning their mind to the bill before the parliament.

They might think that the bill itself is not worth debating in here. That might be one reason they do not address it. They might also think that, because the bill has not changed despite the whole context within
which this debate is being carried out having changed, there is no need to actually describe the aspects of the bill gain. Or they might be honest with themselves and ask, given that the international context has shifted and the debate is alive and well, what is the most appropriate response, and recognise that many of the propositions contained within the Rudd government’s great big tax on anything and everything—and we hear the Labor Party describe it as the CPRS bill—really do not address new insights and new realities. It could be any one of those three things.

What we can conclude is one single, undeniable thing: the Labor Party will not defend its own bill. It describes the subject of the bill as complex, almost like, ‘Don’t worry about it; it is like the workings of an MRI; if you’ve got a bad knee go in and have one, no need to trouble yourselves with how it operates—it will all be right; leave it to the experts.’ They say that makes it a simple proposition. I am not sure the Australian public believe that. I am not sure pious language from the Labor Party about how complex the whole thing is is a justification for not defending what the government is doing and explaining its actions. I do not think that will ring true with most members of the Australian public. I think the Australian public want to know what is in the Rudd government’s great big tax on everything, this ETS bill known as the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill. I think they want to know because they have learned through the debates over recent months that these are important issues at stake.

I think the Australian public clearly understands that both sides of the parliament recognise that there is a need to take responsible action on climate change. I do not even think that there is a debate there any longer, despite the efforts of the Labor Party to resuscitate some lines of that kind. There is no lack of will or desire from the coalition to take action on climate change. The debate is about what sensible action is, what the wise action to take is, given the sentiment that spans this parliament of a willingness and a desire to take action on climate change.

The Rudd Labor government and its Labor members do not even turn their minds to this legislation. Within the legislation it talks about applying a charge. This is where ‘the great big tax on everything’ is an accurate description. It is not as the member for Hunter tried to describe before, where he actually stumbled into an explanation of the opposition’s alternative strategy. No, it is not an idea where you penalise those who drop the ball and go backwards in their emissions performance; that is the opposition’s idea. The proposition embodied in these bills is that you penalise everybody. Everybody is penalised, even the most energy-efficient abatement-sensitive activity, business or production process in our country. That will all be penalised. And those who are not so flash will be penalised as well. It is not only those who have dropped the ball, as the member for Hunter in his contribution would have you believe; everyone cops it through this CPRS. Everyone cops it and generates an enormous amount of revenue for the Rudd Labor government to share with those that it feels are its friends or that it feels obliged to help.

It is noteworthy that even in this House the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Mr Tanner, comes in and tries to just bat away suggestions that this great big tax on everything actually amounts to an enormous impost on the Australian economy of $114 billion over the next nine years—that is right: $114 billion, 114 thousands of millions of dollars, over the next nine years—and then says the opposition’s impact would be greater. He bats away the concern that the opposition has highlighted of a $114 billion revenue-raising tax on everything and what
that will do to the Australian economy, Aus-
talian households and Australian small busi-
nesses by saying: ‘No, don’t trouble your-
selves. Remember, this is complex. That is a 
very big number, but this is complex and you 
need only be concerned with the net cost to 
the government.’ And he describes a lower 
figure.

What is missed, though, is that the cost to 
the Australian nation, the Australian econ-
omy and the Australian community is un-
doubtedly $114 billion. That is undoubtedly 
the cost. Some of that will be given back, not 
on the basis of where it has been raised, be-
cause those newborn nouveau free mar-
keeters across the chamber in the Labor 
Party have reconnected with concepts of 
market after saying that it was a horrible 
things—according to the Prime Minister, 
some months ago. Now they have recon-
ected with the market. Of course, where 
those costs land does not accurately reflect 
where the money goes back. So people can 
be paying a great cost, a great share of that 
$114 billion, under Kevin Rudd’s great big 
new tax, and they will not be getting com-
mensurate compensation.

We have heard in debates in this chamber 
today and last week how, so complex is this 
scheme, Rudd government ministers cannot 
even describe the impact on very credible, 
realistic and not very mysterious family 
types. That is deferred to the table, a broad-
brush table which apparently is not enough 
for the Rudd ministers to give direct an-
swers.

Today we talked about another bearer of 
this great cost, that being the small business 
community, and why they are completely ex-
cluded from the compensation arrange-
ments that seek to soften the harm and hard-
ship caused by $114 billion of new taxes on 
the nation and on businesses over the next 
nine years. It is interesting that the Minister 
for Small Business, Independent Contractors 
and the Service Economy, Dr Emerson, on 
the many, many occasions that this great big 
tax on everything has been debated in this 
parliament, has not once chosen to defend it. 
Even today, when I asked him a question 
about the real-life impact on a drycleaner at 
Queanbeyan, he could not turn his mind to 
that. Instead, as is his wont, he had a go at 
everybody—a little bit of theatre but no an-
wers, which is a very awkward way of con-
fessing to the fact that there is no compensa-
tion for small businesses. They are not a part 
of this $114 billion revenue-raising exercise 
over the next nine years. They are not a part 
of a portion of that coming back to those 
paying most of the burden.

This is a scheme that punishes everybody 
regardless of their level of emissions per-
formance. If you are doing better than many, 
you are punished less. If you are a major 
emitter, you are punished substantially. If 
you are a small business, you are punished, 
and there is no relief for that financial pain 
through the compensation system. And, 
when asked today to explain that, the small-
business minister again failed to address the 
design of the scheme and why small busi-
nesses have been excluded from compen-
sation.

It is not as if that question would have 
been a great surprise. I have repeatedly high-
lighted the failure of the small-business min-
ister to stand up for the constituency he is 
supposed to represent. I have repeatedly 
highlighted how small businesses are ex-
tremely worried and concerned about the 
impact of the Rudd Labor government’s 
great big tax on everything, the ETS, and 
why they have been excluded from compen-
sation. I have repeatedly highlighted how, 
even on the government’s modelling, where 
it seeks to identify the electricity cost in-
crease, the electricity cost increase is seven 
per cent in the first year, accumulating on top
of that a further 12 per cent. That is 19.84 per cent, let us say 20 per cent, in the first two years. That is the electricity cost. A small business or a family will know what that electricity cost increase means. It means increased pressure on the costs of living and increased pressure on the costs of doing business.

What is not in those figures is the increase in energy costs embedded in all of the inputs of the supply chain for what households consume and what businesses produce and provide, as we saw today with the dry-cleaning business—very significant electricity costs and a $3,000 penalty for doing business under the Rudd Labor government’s great big tax on everything. What of the energy costs embedded in their processes, in the machinery they use and in the energy they consume? We know the energy sector is an enormous consumer of electricity in this country. Those costs will run all the way through and accumulate at each stage of production. It is not just about the direct impact on the cost of electricity. Electricity is embedded in everything that goes into production, systems and services. There will be increases in input and supply chain costs for small businesses and in the cost of consumption for households. Householders will look at a 20 per cent increase in their energy costs and be terrified—and rightly so—as those cost pressures just keep mounting under the Rudd Labor government. They will be worried about 20 per cent on top of escalating energy costs. I have described how energy is an enormous cost input for the water sector and how already-spiralling water costs will increase. These are the necessities of life. Families will soon know that energy is embedded in everything that goes on in this country at one stage or another and that, unlike the GST, which is taken out of business inputs and applied only to the last point of sale or transfer, costs will rise at each stage of the production process.

The Rudd Labor government are trying to force this great big tax on everything on the Australian public again and again, despite people’s cautions, worries and concerns about its impact. The Rudd Labor government cannot hear. They just keep forcing this down people’s throats, while people are telling them that prices are going to escalate at every stage of consumption and every stage of their business processes and inputs, leading to a far greater price penalty at the end of the day.

This is why leading organisations like the Australian Retailers Association have again cautioned the Rudd Labor government and challenged it to say what their great big tax on everything will really mean for the costs of goods in retail outlets. That is why COSBOA have pleaded with, not just asked, the government to turn its mind to the impact on the small business community. They have highlighted the exclusion of small businesses from the compensation arrangements and that there is a need to have a look at the punishing impact of this great big tax on everything on all in the business community and in the general community. It is difficult to accept that some households will get compensation and large businesses will get support from the Rudd Labor government to ease the pain of its great big tax on everything but that there is no mention being made of support for small business.

That was highlighted again today when the minister for small business, Dr Emerson, again could not bring himself to address the specific issue of why he and his government will allow small business to cop this great big tax on everything if it is allowed through without any compensation. That is why the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

CPRS deal: Small business left exposed.
They have conducted some really credible research. Castalia Strategic Advisors have identified the costs of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme on Australia's small and medium sized businesses. Has the Rudd Labor government done anything to turn its mind to this input and analysis? Of course not. All it can do is come back into this place and try to jam through the very same flawed and friendless great big tax on everything, the CPRS proposition that got rejected previously by the parliament.

Why do they do this? Why do they insult the intelligence of the Australian public, the clear message of concern from the Australian community and the outrage of those in the small business community by simply stamping up the same old thing? They do it because this is a government that learns nothing. It is a government that will not learn from its experiences and will not recognise its mistakes. It is a government that uses objective analysis so selectively that, rather than look dispassionately at a problem and what strategies might be implemented, they decide what they want to do and then shop around for some kind of information to back it up. That is not evidence based policy; that is policy in search of some evidence to back it up. Again, this is what we are seeing in this chamber today.

I am surprised that the Rudd Labor government is not aware of the work that was carried out by the City of Greater Bendigo about the price penalty that is already being paid by non-city electricity users because of higher electricity transmission charges outside our capital cities. Small businesses and families living in non-city areas are already paying more for their electricity through higher network charges. The figures range from 20 per cent to as much as 43 per cent more, depending on what state you live in. They are going to get another slug in the neck from this great big tax on everything. We have not seen any comprehensive modelling about how the energy price increases will work their way through the different activities, production and cost structures of businesses in the economy. We are told what the direct electricity costs will be but we have not seen how the costs will wash through every stage of production and every step of the business chain. Those living outside our capital cities are already paying a premium for their electricity and they are going to be paying again.

So what does a drycleaner in a regional centre do when faced with no compensation because the Rudd Labor government does not care—small business can just cop it—and already facing price penalties because of higher transmission charges embedded in their electricity costs? They cannot pick up their business and move it to a capital city. Drycleaners need to be close to their customers. Those businesses will have an additional cost burden that will compromise their capacity to employ, undermine their viability and invariably mean higher costs to consumers. The very cost-of-living pressures that are already troubling the vast majority of households in Australia are almost being placed on steroids by the Rudd Labor government through this great big tax on everything.

So that is what this bill is about. I thought someone needed to talk about the specifics of the bill, because the Rudd Labor government members will not defend it. They are just going to use platitudes and talk in broad concepts about what they are trying to do. They will say: 'Isn't this a great idea? It's all too complex to explain to you, but it's a simple proposition at the end of the day; just go with what Kevin Rudd wants you to do.' The opposition does not believe that that is a sensible way forward and has mapped out a far more direct, affordable and appropriate strategy. It is a strategy that reflects the fact that the global situation does matter and that that
situation has changed, that there is a need to respond to those circumstances but to take practical and positive action on climate change.

As I said at the beginning, there is no lack of will or desire on the part of the coalition to take action. It is about what is wise action to take in the current environment. The coalition’s plan for direct action on climate change—and I am pleased that my friend and colleague the member for Flinders is here; he is a significant author of this body of work—actually will achieve the reductions in emissions for Australia that the Rudd government’s great big tax on everything says it will achieve, but without the pain. The government model will cause pain that is not properly costed and modelled, that will run through every activity in this country. It is pain that starts with the cost of electricity. Wherever electricity is used in anything that goes on in our nation, that cost penalty will be there and will be built upon by further activity and further steps that add to the production process, to consumption and to the cost for households and consumers. The Rudd Labor government would be well served to have a good think about this. It has an exit strategy. That exit strategy is to concede that it has got it wrong and that the coalition’s plan is more directly targeted and deserves support, not ridicule. (Time expired)

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (8.23 pm)—I rise to speak on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related bills. Climate change is perhaps a more important issue than any we have faced in many decades. Human activity is damaging our climate and the world needs to minimise the impact on future generations and our world. Listening to the member for Dunkley, I am reminded once again of how difficult this issue is, because it is not a cost-free issue. If we do not act, there will be costs now. In the political environment, where we face the people every three years, it is very easy to take an easy road and not act now. That is not something the government are prepared to do. We will meet our obligations to future generations.

Given that there has been so much muddying of the waters lately, building a climate of fear and confusion around this issue, I thought that it would be worthwhile to go back to the basics, to the things that most of us—perhaps excluding members of the opposition—agree on. Firstly, climate change is real. That is a view backed by longstanding science which has been extensively peer reviewed. The consensus view among scientists and governments around the world is that the evidence on warming is unequivocal, that average surface temperatures have risen by 0.74 degrees Centigrade in the last 100 years. Thirteen of the 14 warmest years on record occurred between 1995 and 2008. The projected global average warming to 2100 is around 1.1 to 6.4 degrees Centigrade, and the projection for sea level rises is up to 0.8 of a metre. More recent reports suggest that it may be higher.

It is true that there are a small number of scientists who dispute the science. Around the world, a number of people without a scientific background have been swayed by that, including, it seems, many on the opposition benches. To some extent, I can understand it. The issue is scary; it really is. The impact that we have already had and the damage that we will do without action is scary. It is difficult to believe, and there are days when I would rather not believe it either. I have talked to scientists, too, who want the science to be disproved, who look almost with great longing at alternative opinions and hope for them to be true. Nobody in their right mind wants climate change to be true, but look at the sheer number of scientists who support the science of climate
change. The evidence is overwhelming and we are obliged to believe it, no matter how hard that may be.

The world is warming. Human activity is contributing to that warming. Unless we act, increasing temperatures will have catastrophic consequences for our environment, our way of life and our standard of living. True, there are best-case and worst-case scenarios, but there is general consensus that even if we manage to hold temperature increases to two degrees, a target set at Copenhagen, it is most likely that there will still be serious changes to the climate that will impact significantly on our children. The world needs to act and the world has agreed to act. In fact, many years ago it agreed to act. As difficult as the change has been and will be, we are part of that world and must play our part, not as a follower that waits for the rest of the world to tell us what to do. That is not what we do here. It is not what we have done historically on the major issues that have faced the world. We should act as a country looking after its own interests by participating at the forefront of the design of new methods for combating climate change, making sure that as the world moves forward we have our economic systems in place and sufficient investment to ensure that we have a strong future in a new, cleaner age.

We need to act sooner rather than later. Actually, I suspect we needed to act a few years ago. I think the electorate understands that absolutely. We need to act because the costs of inaction are greater than the costs of action. Some of the impacts we are potentially facing without action are quite catastrophic for our nation. By 2070, up to 40 per cent more drought months are projected in eastern Australia and up to 80 per cent more in south-western Australia. Exports of key commodities could fall by up to 63 per cent in the next 20 years and by up to 79 per cent by 2050. Up to 247,000 residential buildings, worth around $63 billion, are at risk from sea inundation by 2100. Climate change related coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef may cost $37.7 billion in lost economic value and the loss of 60,000 jobs. Irrigated agricultural production in the Murray-Darling Basin will drop by over 90 per cent by 2100, and there are 90,000 people employed in agriculture in the basin. The Stern review found that if we do not act the overall cost will be equivalent to losing between five and 20 per cent of global GDP each year. They are all significant costs of inaction—something that the opposition seems to fail to grasp. If these figures are alarming, that is because the consequences of not taking serious action on this are alarming. We should be frightened of inaction on this. We should be afraid of the economic costs of failing to act and we should be ashamed of the lost years.

While the costs of inaction are high, in environmental damage, in social costs and for our economic future, there are of course also costs associated with action. Unfortunately, in a catastrophe of this size there is no cost-free solution. But all serious reports indicate that the cost of delay is high. Treasury modelling shows that economies that defer action face long-term costs around 15 per cent higher than those that take action now. To put this into a global context, the International Energy Agency predicts—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 34. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The honourable member for Parramatta will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

PETITIONS

Mrs Irwin—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance
with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

**Youth Allowance**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House to the Rudd Government’s changes to the workforce participation criteria for establishing independence under Youth Allowance by removing the following two eligibility criteria: that the recipient worked part-time for 15+ hours per week for two years or more since leaving school; and the recipient earned, in an 18-month period since leaving school, an amount equivalent to 75% of the maximum rate of pay (in 2009 this requires earnings of $19,532). The effect of this change is that eligibility criteria for the Independent Youth Allowance will retrospectively require participants to complete 30 hours work per week over a 18/24 month period compared to earning $19,532 over 18 months.

This means a student who has complied with the previous rules but not worked 30 hours per week will have lost the credit for their effort and must start again thus losing 2 years before commencing a University Course.

These proposal further disadvantages young people whose place of residence is beyond daily commuting distance from a University and thus must fund their total accommodation costs over and above the other direct costs of such an education. That working 30 hours per week while attending University is virtually impossible in more intensive courses.

We therefore ask the House to change the criteria so that rural and regional students are not disadvantaged.

by **Mrs Irwin** (from 1,516 citizens)

**Marriage**

To the honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

RETAIN THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN

We, the undersigned citizens draw to the attention of the House of Representatives assembled, that the definition of marriage as “a union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life” is the foundation upon which our families are built and on which our society stands. To alter the definition of marriage to include same-sex “marriage”, as proposed by the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill, would be to change the very structure of society to the detriment of all, especially children.

We, the undersigned citizens therefore request that the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009, be opposed.

by **Mrs Irwin** (from 9,003 citizens)

**National School Chaplaincy Program**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

In Support of the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP)

This petition of certain concerned citizens of Australia draws the attention of the house to the following:

- The National School Chaplaincy Program, built on the excellent history of school chaplaincy in Australia, was introduced by the former Coalition Government in 2007/08 with a commitment of $165 million for its first three years. It was endorsed by Prime Minister Rudd who said “they (Chaplains) actually are providing the glue which keeps school communities rolling”;

- The program offers pastoral care and spiritual guidance to all. Chaplains necessarily have religious beliefs which underpin their work. These beliefs are representative of the school communities the chaplains work in and they do not hinder chaplains from working with those of other beliefs or none. It operates in 1915 schools and enjoys strong support among principals, schools and in the community generally.

- The Rudd Government (as at October 2009) has refused to confirm its ongoing support and funding for the program, despite the program’s social benefits, sound administration and strong community support.
We, the undersigned petitioners, request that the House urges the Rudd Government continue providing funding for the National School Chaplaincy Program in its current form.

by Mrs Irwin (from 106 citizens)

Trade: Live Animal Exports

To the Honourable Members of the House of Representatives in the Parliament assembled:

This petition of undersigned citizens of Australia calls on the Australian Government to end the export of live animals from Australia to the Middle East.

We the undersigned therefore call on the House of Representatives to ensure that the Australian government ends this trade and, in doing, restore Australia’s reputation as a compassionate and ethical nation.

by Mrs Irwin (from 36,068 citizens)

Montevideo Maru

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain residents of the Country of… draws to the attention of the House the need to arrive at the truth of the events involving the Montevideo Maru and the fate of 845 POW and 208 internees from The Mandated Territory of New Guinea [now Papua New Guinea], said to be on board when the vessel was sunk.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to support any investigation made to establish the truth relative to the identity of the ship torpedoed 1 July 1942 in the Philippine waters and alleged to have been the Montevideo Maru.

by Mrs Irwin (from 239 citizens)

Papua New Guinea

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain residents of draws … to the attention of the House to have interested people expressing a desire to arrive at the truth of what happened during the Japanese occupation on the Island of New Britain, New Ireland, Watom Island and surrounding Islands in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea).

Your petitioners therefore request the House to support an investigation by the relatives to request the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments to discover all burial places of service men and civilians still missing. The families of these men have a right to know where they are buried.

by Mrs Irwin (from 156 citizens)

National Marriage Day

To the honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

PETITION TO DECLARE THE 13TH AUGUST AS NATIONAL MARRIAGE DAY

We, the undersigned citizens of Australia draw to the attention of the House our united opposition to the inhumane practice of recreational hunting on public government lards. To permit, and by so doing, encourage shooting for pleasure is a completely anti-social and dangerous activity for governments to be endorsing. Recreational hunting on public lands not only endangers native fauna but also puts at risk public safety. In NSW, government officials have now permitted recreational hunting in some 372 public forests, covering more than 2 million hectares,
with more public lands soon to be declared “open season”.

The NSW Game Council is currently using tax payers’ money to promote market and expand the interests of hunters groups. All the representatives on the Government’s Game Council are pro-hunting interests, with most being active hunters themselves. Shooters’ groups are presently overseeing their own dangerous activities on public lands. Bows and arrows and hunting dogs are sanctioned under current government legislation, permitting unacceptable cruelty to both introduced animals and native wildlife.

We, the undersigned, seek the abolition of all hunting practices on public lands and reserves.

by Mrs Irwin (from 190 citizens)

Human Rights: Falun Gong

To the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

1. I have been made aware that Ms Sufang Zhang, mother of Kalgoorlie resident and Australian citizen Ms Kun (Suzy) Yang, was arrested by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for her spiritual belief of Falun Gong on July 4, 2008 just before the Olympic Games and now she has been sentenced without trial to a year’s imprisonment in one of China’s notorious forced labour camps.

2. I understand that Falun Gong (also known as Falun Dafa) is a peaceful meditation practice based on the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance and since 1999 Falun Gong practitioners have been brutally persecuted by the CCP with more than 3,000 confirmed deaths due to torture in detention facilities in China.

3. I am also very concerned that recent investigations and reports by Canadian human rights lawyers David Matas and David Kilgour, European Parliament Vice President Edward McMillan-Scott, and UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Dr. Manfred Nowak, have alleged that the Chinese Communist Regime has overseen the fatal harvesting of organs from an estimated 41,500 unwilling Falun Gong practitioners for profit. (www.organharvestinvestigation.net/)

We therefore ask the House to: “Help rescue Ms Zhang from a barbaric facility where torture is routine so she can be reunited with her daughter”

by Mrs Irwin (from 2,138 citizens)

Renewable Energy

To the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of the undersigned citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the house, that we believe not enough is being done to extend and expand ‘clean’ energy and environmentally sustainable development.

We therefore respectfully ask the house to work towards the immediate creation of an interconnected electricity grid with our closest international neighbours, and to ensure that this electricity grid is fed by significant renewable sources.

by Mrs Irwin (from 49 citizens)

Religious Persecution

To the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

Your petitioners humbly request the House to support all efforts by Muslims to have apostasy law reformed, so that Muslims who chose to leave their faith are no longer liable to any penalty but are free to follow their new convictions without fear, in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also ask the House to use its influence on the Governments of countries where punishments for apostasy are part of the legal system, to encourage abolition.

by Mrs Irwin (from 1 citizen)

Pensions and Benefits

To the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the following facts and considerations:

• the Newstart and sole-parent pension rates were not increased in the 2009 federal budget along with the disability support, single age and carer pension rates;
• with the Newstart base rate at $456 per fortnight ($228 per week), it will be hard for unemployed persons to maintain morale and dignity while they search for new employment;

• with the sole-parent base rate at $574.50 per fortnight ($287.25 per week), many sole parents will struggle to make ends meet and provide adequate material conditions for their children’s wellbeing;

• the twice-yearly indexation makes a minimal difference to the amount actually received by unemployed persons and sole parents.

We therefore ask the House to ensure that the Newstart and sole-parent pension rates are reconsidered at the earliest possible opportunity, with a view to their being raised to realistic levels before the 2010 budget.

by Mrs Irwin (from 71 citizens)

Whaling
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain residents in the State of Western Australia points out to the House that Japan will be carrying out scientific whaling within the summer feeding grounds of endangered species of whales, such as humpbacks, southern right and blue whales that visit our shores in the southern hemisphere’s winter. The feeding grounds include Australia’s territories in Antarctica. Australia outlawed whaling in 1978 and introduced the Whale Protection Act in 1980. Japan’s hunting of the species named and minke whales (not threatened) is unnecessary, inhumane and a threat to Australia’s coastal, eco-tourist industries. We your petitioner’s pray that the House will place economic sanctions on Japan until such time as they permanently desist from any form of whaling in Antarctica.

by Mrs Irwin (from 156 citizens)

Climate Change
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of citizens of Australia believe that the time to avert irreversible climate change is now.

We therefore ask the House to:

1. Go to Copenhagen with a firm commitment to reduce carbon emissions by at least 40% by 2020, as current science indicates. This supports Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) call to limit global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

2. We ask that the Australian government formally recognise that without measurable, reportable and verifiable financing from developed countries, developing nations will not accept commitment to slow their emissions growth, and without effort from developing nations, Annexe 1 nations will not commit to ambitious emission reduction targets.

3. Therefore Australia must honour the commitment made in the Bali to contribute to financing mitigation and adaptation in developing nations, especially our Pacific and South East Asian neighbours. This commitment should be in the order of 0.5% GDP which is approximately $4 Billion per annum.

by Mrs Irwin (from 842 citizens)
This petition of Raymond Allan and Suzanne Dawn Dousset, citizens of Australia, draws to the attention of the House that whilst living in China, in 2002 we began a relationship with 10 year-old orphan Wang Xiang (later named Deborah). Deborah was abandoned at three weeks of age. She has minor physical disability of the hips and legs, and an intellectual age 3-4 years behind her physical age. Neither requires on-going treatment, nor either an impediment to her playing a role in Australian society.

In 2005 we began fostering Deborah, and two attempts and an appeal to adopt her failed because of a 14 year-old age limit. This was in spite of our long-term relationship with her, and that she had been living with us since her 14th birthday. We have seven adult children and six grandchildren.

We returned to Australia in August and currently have Deborah with us on a six-month tourist visa which expires on 11 February. This is marked with an 8503 restriction (Not to be extended), which we have unsuccessfully appealed.

Deborah does not meet any requirements for immigration to Australia, so the office of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has indicated he is unable to intervene.

We respectfully request the House to take whatever action is appropriate to allow Chinese orphan Wang Xiang (Deborah) to migrate to Australia on compassionate grounds, and to live with Raymond and Suzanne Dousset.

by Mrs Irwin (from 586 citizens)

Camden Airport

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

STOP INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AT CAMDEN AIRPORT

This petition of certain Citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House a matter under the Airports Act 1996 where Camden Airport Limited, via their Draft Master Plan 2010 for Camden Airport NSW, seeks to allow development of airport land for non-aviation related uses such as bulking goods retailing, industrial and business premises, road transport terminals etc. This would conflict with Camden Aerodrome’s historical significance and its rural setting in environmentally sensitive land which is home to endangered species of flora.

We therefore ask the House to impose limitations on use at Camden Aerodrome to exclude activities and development that are not related to aviation and aviation support. We further ask that the historical and rural nature of this airfield be protected from any inappropriate development.

by Mrs Irwin (from 1,051 citizens)

Chinese-Speaking Community

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

This petition of concerned Victorian citizens draws to the attention of the House:

1. The lack of recognition of the actual size of the rapidly-growing Chinese-speaking aged population;
2. The severe shortage of residential care places and community care packages that can cater for the specific needs of Chinese-speaking senior Victorians;
3. The shortfall of approximately 562 aged care places to which Chinese-speaking senior Victorians are entitled based on the national aged care planning benchmark;
4. The sufferings of Chinese-speaking senior Victorians and their carers when eligible applicants have been on the waiting lists of Chinese-specific aged care services for more than three years and some passed on before they could secure a place;
5. Pro-active measures need to be in place to respond to the substantial increase of Chinese-speaking aged population in Victoria, estimated to grow by more than 300% from 2006 to 2026.

We therefore ask the House to:

1. Acknowledge that Australian citizens of Chinese background come from more than 100 countries and Government statistical data on the Chinese community should be compiled based on the language spoken at home instead of country of birth/origin;
2. Give priority to the Victorian Chinese-speaking community in its allocation of residential care places and community care
packages in the forthcoming Aged Care Approvals Round;

3. Develop a strategic plan, through community consultations, to address the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for aged care services.

by Mrs Irwin (from 12,430 citizens)

Human Rights: Falun Gong

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Global Effort to Stop the Persecution of Falun Gong.

This petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that Falun Dafa (also known as Falun Gong) is a peaceful meditation practice based on the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance. Falun Gong practitioners in China have been subjected to the most brutal and relentless persecution by the Chinese communist regime since July 1999, causing thousands to lose their lives and many thousands more to be physically and mentally impaired from torture. According to investigative reports written by Canadian human rights lawyer David Matas and former Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) David Kilgour, thousands more Falun Gong practitioners have been subjected to forced organ harvesting for China’s lucrative transplant market and lost their lives (www.organharvestinvestigation.net/).

We therefore ask the House to request the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister to openly, forthrightly and immediately call for an immediate end to the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

by Mrs Irwin (from 3,203 citizens)

National School Chaplaincy Program

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the National School Chaplaincy Program, built on the excellent history of school chaplaincy in Australia, which was introduced by the former Coalition Government in 2007/08 with a commitment of $165 million for its first three years. It was endorsed by Prime Minister Rudd who said “they (Chaplains) actually are providing the glue which keeps school communities rolling”.

The program offers pastoral care and spiritual guidance to all. Chaplains necessarily have religious beliefs which underpin their work. These beliefs are representative of the school communities the chaplains work in and they do not hinder chaplains from working with those of other beliefs or none. It operates in 1915 schools and enjoys strong support among principals, schools and in the community generally.

The Rudd Government has extended funding for the program, at a reduced level, until the end of 2011, after which time there may be no more funding despite the program’s social benefits, sound administration and strong community support. Malcolm Turnbull has announced that if elected, the Coalition would continue funding the program in its current form, at its current level of $165 million over 3 years.

We therefore ask that the Rudd Government continue funding for the National School Chaplaincy Program in its current form.

by Mrs Irwin (from 20 citizens)

National Archives of Australia

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

CLOSURE OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OFFICES IN ADELAIDE, DARWIN AND HOBART

This petition of concerned citizens draws to the attention of the House to the following:

- The announcement of the closure of the Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart offices of the National Archives of Australia starting in less than 10 months with the Darwin office;
- The contradiction between this announcement and the service stated to be provided to the public in the National Archives of Australia’s Service Charter, viz: “We have reading rooms in each capital city in Australia where you can research the Commonwealth records held there.”;
- The contradiction between the announcement and the Government’s commitment to more openness in government as stated on the
website of Prime Minister and Cabinet in relation to changes to the Freedom of Information regime;

- The disadvantage this imposes on the people of those states and Northern Territory, not least to indigenous people who are part of the Stolen Generation, and on child migrants, so recently acknowledged by the Prime Minister, who attempt to trace their family;

- The withdrawal of the help pledged by the National Archives of Australia to “Australian Government agencies to create and manage their records” to those agencies in South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

We therefore ask the House to instruct the National Archives of Australia to reverse its decision and to provide funds to the National Archives of Australia so as to sustain the services of those offices in Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart into the future.

by Mrs Irwin (from 5,748 citizens)

Immigration and Citizenship

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House, the Government’s commitment on 26/1/1988, giving amnesty to all immigrants/refugees, at that time, which, to this day, has still to be en-acted.

Draws to the attention of the house: that A National Human Rights Consultation was launched on 10th December 2008, by attorney general seeking the views of the Australian public on which human rights and responsibilities they consider are important … still to be finalized.

We therefore ask the House to consider: Is it not a “Universal truth” that all men and women are created equal, and endowed, by the Creator, with the power of creative reason? i.e. human.

Is it not the expression of this creativity, through education, and advances and application of scientific discoveries, which has lead to the improvements in the standards of living, and subsequently, the ability to support higher population densities?

We have within our country a small percent of well educated and skilled persons who came to our shores in search of the means to improve their lives, who are contributing within our economy without recognition, support or even acknowledgement of their existence here, as an human being. (non-persons)

As you grant a citizenship certificates to new Australians annually, on this special, Australian day; 26 of January, please consider granting compassionately a permanent residency, to ones who desperately need a place to call home. So please be fair as usual!

by Mrs Irwin (from 5 citizens)
Petitions received.

Responses

Mrs Irwin—Ministerial responses to petitions previously presented to the House have been received as follows:

Medicare Cataract Surgery Rebate

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2009 regarding the petition submitted by the citizens of Western Australia against the 50% reduction to the Medicare rebate for cataract surgery.

As you are aware, as part of the 2009-10 Budget, it was announced that the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) fee for cataract and coronary angiography procedures will be adjusted to more appropriately reflect the time and complexity of these services, and will take effect from 1 November 2009.

Over the past 20 years there has been significant advancement in the technology used to carry out cataract operations, which means they can now be performed faster, with better results, and are safer for patients. To put this into context, the cataract procedure that takes around 20 minutes has had a similar fee as the payment made by the Australian Government for complex skull surgery (cranioplasty), which takes more time to perform and carries greater risk for the patient.

The changes made by the Government more accurately reflect the time taken to carry out these procedures. It is important to note that 95% of cataract procedures are undertaken in hospital. In these circumstances, in addition to the revised MBS rebate for the most common cataract procedure (item 42702), an average of $1,700 is also provided through private health insurance rebates to cover the cost of the accommodation, theatre, lens and ancillary fees.

My Department has worked closely with the profession to determine the fees and weightings to be applied to the other cataract items within the overarching funding allocation. A new item for complex cataract procedures with a higher Schedule fee has also been developed in consultation with the profession in recognition of the additional time and complexity required for some cataract procedures.

On 28 October 2009, the Senate passed a motion to disallow MBS cataract surgery items 42698, 42701, 42702 and 42718 from the Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulations 2009. This effectively meant there would have been no Medicare rebates available for those services from 1 November 2009. On 29 October 2009, I signed a Determination, in accordance with section 3C of the Health Insurance Act 1973, reinstating those items. As such, rebates for in-hospital services from 1 November 2009 are $263.25 for MBS item 42698, $155.10 for item 42701, $340.80 for item 42702 and $675.60 for item 42718. MBS item 42718 is the new complex item providing for lens extraction and insertion of artificial lens, with a surgical procedure time of 40 minutes or more.

In order for the Government to continue to provide funding for new and improved procedures and medications for the community, the Government needs to ensure that it is able to make changes to fees when procedures become less costly to perform.

It is important to note that on average, an ophthalmologist receives around $580,000 annually, from Medicare rebates alone, and even with the reduction in rebate for cataract surgery, this will still amount to around $500,000 per annum.

The Government recognises that in some communities, particularly rural and remote Australia, dedicated ophthalmologists provide a range of services, including cataract surgery, where they would otherwise not be available. Medicare is a universal scheme offering equality of access to all Australians, with the same level of rebate regardless of location. However, for practitioners treating patients in rural and remote areas, further to the MBS benefit, additional financial assistance in some communities is currently provided through the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program (MSOAP), as well as similar schemes run by the State and Territory Health Departments.

The MSOAP provides financial support to specialists providing outreach services in rural and remote Australia. The Program improves the access of people living in rural and remote Australia to medical specialist services by complementing outreach specialist services provided by the State
and Northern Territory Governments. Funds are available for the costs of travel, meals and accommodation, facility fees, administrative support at the outreach location, lease and transport of equipment, telephone support and up-skilling sessions for resident health professionals. During 2007-08, the Program provided funding of over $800,000 for ophthalmology services. The Australian Government will continue to provide additional funding for these services, and will work with the profession to ensure these services are not compromised.

I trust that the above information is of assistance.

from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon

Military Justice

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2009 concerning a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions on Australia’s military justice system.

The petition draws attention to recommendations 29 and 30 of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee report on The effectiveness of Australia’s military justice system of 16 June 2005 (the 2005 Senate Report), ‘principles of service in the ADF’; and ‘the Constitutional obligation to have an effective military justice system’. It submits that self-regulation by the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston AC AFC, and Service Chiefs is an unreliable basis for ensuring the probity of military justice and has requested the House institute changes which will require the CDF and his commanders to ‘uphold Australian law and adhere to the statutes of military justice’.

Recommendation 29 of the 2005 Senate Report concerned the establishment of an Australian Defence Force Administrative Review Board, a statutory body, with an independent chairperson, to review military grievances and submit findings and recommendations to the CDF. The Australian Government of the time did riot agree to this recommendation, but did acknowledge that there was a need to improve the complaints and redress of grievance management system.

Recommendation 30 of the 2005 Senate Report was to establish a task force to finalise grievances that had been outstanding for over 12 months. This was agreed and that action has occurred.

There has been significant improvement and reform to the military justice system since the 2005 Senate Report, and this is continuing. It has included streamlining the complaint and redress of grievance management system within the Australian Defence Force, improved reporting and oversight, greater education for commanders in the exercise of their administrative decision making and further education and awareness for members of the Australian Defence Force generally on their right to make a complaint, and avenues of complaint, such as the Inspector General Australian Defence Force (IGADF) and the Defence Force Ombudsman.

The IGADF, a statutorily independent position is empowered to review, inquire into and report on the health and effectiveness of the military justice system. The IGADF continues to receive submissions and undertake inquiries and audits of military justice practices and procedures at ADF units, independent of the chain of command.

An independent review of the health of the military justice system conducted by Sir Laurence Street AC KCMG QC and Air Marshal Les Fisher AO (Retd) in 2008 concluded that the military justice system is delivering and should continue to deliver impartial, rigorous and fair outcomes; has greater transparency and enhanced oversight; is substantially more independent of the chain of command; and is effective in maintaining a high standard of discipline.

A military justice system must meet the needs of Defence in terms of minimising impact to operational effectiveness, while at the same time being fair and having due regard to the rights of individual members. The present system has in place frameworks that seek to safeguard the effectiveness of Australia’s military justice system, both in regard to administrative sanctions and allegations of breaches of the Defence Force Discipline Act 1982. Improvements can, and will, continue to be made, as is evident in the Government’s current work to address the recent decision of the High Court of Australia in Lane v Morrison regarding the validity of the Australian Military Court.
The CDF and his commanders are required to comply with Australian law, including the rules and principles of administrative law, at all times, and it will be a matter of constant review to ensure that Australia’s military justice system provides an optimal approach that protects and supports both the rights of individuals and Australia’s national interest.

For the reasons outlined above, it is not considered necessary to introduce changes to the military justice system in addition to those already being progressed or considered, or to revisit recommendations made in the 2005 Senate Report, which were not accepted.

from the Minister for Defence, Senator Faulkner

Indigenous Languages

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 3 September 2009 concerning the recently submitted petition regarding Indigenous languages in Australia.

I am pleased to report that a National Indigenous Languages Policy was jointly announced on 9 August 2009 by myself, as the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP.

The policy confirmed the Australian Government’s commitment to keeping Indigenous languages alive and supporting Indigenous Australians to connect with their language and culture.

Importantly, this is the first dedicated national Indigenous languages policy Australia has adopted.

In collaboration with other Australian Government departments, the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts is currently developing a practical plan to implement this policy.

This will involve consultation with state and territory government agencies and Indigenous language organisations to ensure the policy will achieve the outcomes sought.

As part of the broader implementation of the policy, my Department will examine the proposal for a National Indigenous Languages Centre.

You should also note that the Australian Government is pursuing the idea of a national Indigenous Cultural Education and Knowledge Centre arising from the Australia 2020 Summit.

As a first step, a feasibility study will be undertaken to develop possible models and options for such a centre, for consideration by Government.

The Australian Government currently supports extensive maintenance and revival of Indigenous languages through the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program which is providing $9.3 million in 2009-10 to some 65 projects nationally, involving around 200 languages.

The policy can be found at: www.arts.gov.au/indigenous/languages policy

Thank you for writing on this matter.

from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett

Trail and Monkey Bikes

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 12 August 2009 regarding a petition presented by Mr Nick Champion MP concerning the import and sale of monkey bikes (miniature motorcycles).

Several States, including South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania have introduced bans on unsafe miniature motorcycles that do not have adequate steering, brakes, foot pegs, throttle control and engine kill switches.

As part of the development of a single national Australian Consumer Law, the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs (MCCA) is currently undertaking a project to harmonise the existing Commonwealth and State and Territory Government product bans and mandatory safety standards. As part of this project, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is examining the case for introducing similar national regulations for unsafe miniature motorcycles. If a Commonwealth ban or standard is made pursuant to the Trade Practices Act 1974 (TPA), it would be illegal for a supplier to sell miniature motorcycles that do not comply with that ban or standard.

Beyond the question of whether particular miniature motorcycles pose inherent safety risks through their design or construction, the riding of miniature motorcycles in public places is not an
activity that can be regulated through the TPA. Rather, regulation of the use of miniature motorcycles in a way that disturbs public amenity or safety would generally be a Police matter. I am advised that most States and Territories make it an offence to ride unregistered vehicles, such as miniature motorcycles on streets, footpaths or in public places.

I trust this information will be of assistance to you.

from the Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, Mr Emerson

Burma

Dear Ms Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 19 August 2009 about a petition from the Burma Campaign Australia submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions.

The Government is gravely concerned by the Burmese regime’s suppression of the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people and its lack of respect for their human rights. I have been strongly critical of the Burmese regime and the lack of political progress in Burma.

Australia consistently urges the Burmese regime to engage in a genuinely inclusive process of political reform and national reconciliation, and to seek non-military solutions to Burma’s ethnic conflicts.

The Government has condemned the conviction of Aung San Suu Kyi on spurious charges. Both the Prime Minister and I issued statements on 11 August 2009 expressing Australia’s deep concerns about her conviction and continued house arrest. I also made a statement to the Parliament on 12 August 2009. Australia has repeatedly called for the immediate and unconditional release of the more than 2000 political prisoners in Burma. I have conveyed Australia’s views on these issues directly to my Burmese counterpart, as has Australia’s Ambassador in Rangoon to senior levels in the Burmese regime.

Australia maintains pressure on the Burmese regime directly through targeted financial sanctions and travel restrictions against senior regime figures, including their associates and supporters. Information on Australia’s financial sanctions, including the list of 463 individuals targeted by the sanctions, can be found on the Reserve Bank of Australia’s website at www.rba.gov.au.

The Government’s policy is neither to encourage nor to discourage trade with or investment in Burma. Australia maintains a ban on all defence exports to Burma and has supported the United Kingdom’s call for a global arms embargo against Burma. Australia does not impose sanctions against trade with or investment in Burma. The Government believes that non-universal trade sanctions would not be effective in promoting change in Burma.

There have been a number of recent developments in relation to sanctions applying to Burma. In announcing the outcomes of its policy review on Burma, the United States foreshadowed the possibility of lifting its sanctions, should the regime take significant steps to address international concerns. In October, the regime responded positively to Aung San Suu Kyi’s offer to cooperate on the withdrawal of sanctions, and permitted her meeting on 9 October with the Chargé d’Affaires of the Australian Embassy in Rangoon and UK and US Embassy representatives. Australia will maintain a policy of targeted financial sanctions as this process develops.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith

National Marriage Day

Dear Mrs Irwin

I refer to your letter dated 17 September 2009 seeking a written response to a petition submitted to your Committee requesting that 13 August each year be declared as National Marriage Day.

This petition suggests that recognising the contribution that intact, stable marriages make to the well-being of children and society is important. The Government is of the view that a range of factors contribute to supporting the well-being of children and society. For example, initiatives recognising and raising public awareness about human rights, the rights of children, the welfare of the family and the need for non discrimination.
The Government is aware that there are already a number of established observed national and international days that may raise awareness and recognise how people can and do contribute to the well-being of children and society. Examples of these are National Families Week (10-16 May), Anti-Poverty Week (14-20 August), International Youth Day (12 August) and International Human Rights Day, held on 10 December each year.

National Families Week in Australia, in particular, is designed to celebrate family diversity and recognise the many different family types existing throughout Australia. I understand that a key objective of National Families Week in 2009 was to encourage Australians to think about, acknowledge and respect the diversity of the family unit. The Government supports this initiative.

The Government does not support a particular day being declared an annual National Marriage Day.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee when considering this petition.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Postnatal Depression

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2009 regarding the petition on postnatal depression.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments are working together to implement the National Perinatal Depression Initiative. The initiative, which began in 2008-09, aims to improve prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression, and to provide better care, support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing depression.

The Australian Government’s contribution of $55 million over five years includes:

• $30 million to state and territory governments to contribute to the roll out of routine and universal screening, support services, and training and development for health professionals;

• an additional $20 million to the Access to Allied Psychological Services Initiative to increase the capacity of Divisions of General Practice to better support women with perinatal depression through the provision of focused psychological strategies; and

• $5 million to beyondblue to support implementation, including the development of materials that support professional practice, such as national perinatal depression screening guidelines and training materials, the raising of community awareness and promotion of help-seeking behaviour in relation to perinatal depression.

In addition to the funding being provided to states and territories, it is anticipated that state and territory governments will also contribute approximately $30 million in funding to supplement the roll out of routine and universal screening, support services, and training for health professionals.

The following key elements are integral to the National Perinatal Depression Initiative:

• routine and universal screening for perinatal depression, offered once antenatally and once postnatally;

• follow up support and care for women assessed as being at-risk of, or experiencing, perinatal depression;

• workforce training and development for health professionals;

• research and data collection;

• national guidelines for screening for perinatal depression; and

• community awareness.

The Petition attached to your letter refers directly to the promotion of postnatal depression among medical practitioners and raising awareness within the community. The National Perinatal Depression Initiative is specifically responding to these needs.

Through the Initiative, training, development and materials to support professional practice will be available to help health professionals in: raising the awareness of perinatal depression; the use of screening tools to identify women at-risk of, or experiencing, perinatal depression, and the appropriate referral mechanisms; and the availability and provision of appropriate treatment and support.
Community awareness activities through the Initiative will include: promoting the importance of routine screening as a way of ensuring early detection and identification of perinatal depression, and therefore early intervention; promoting the benefits of management and treatment of perinatal depression for women, as well as the benefits for families; and providing accessible information to the community about perinatal depression and the available treatment and support.

I hope this information is of assistance to you.

from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon

Traveston Crossing Dam

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 17 September 2009 concerning the submission of a petition regarding the Traveston Crossing Dam.

The Australian Government’s responsibilities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act), in relation to proposals, such as the Traveston Crossing Dam, focus on the protection of certain defined matters of national environmental significance. These matters include world and national heritage properties, wetlands of international importance, nationally threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species, nuclear actions, Commonwealth marine areas and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

As you may be aware, on 2 December 2009 I rejected the Traveston Crossing Dam on the basis of unacceptable impacts on listed threatened species and communities. My decision was based primarily on science and it is clear to me that the proposal cannot go ahead without unacceptable impacts on nationally protected matters.

In particular, the proposal would have serious and irreversible adverse effects on listed threatened species including the Australian Lungfish, Mary River Turtle and Mary River Cod.

In making my decision I also carefully considered the independent expert reviews commissioned by my department focusing on the hydrological and faunal impacts of the proposal, including at the estuary.

Additional information on my final decision on the proposal and the decision making process under the EPBC Act can be located on the department’s website at: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/notices/assessments/2006/3150/traveston-dam-the-federal-process.html.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett

Parallel Import Restrictions on Books

Dear Mrs Irwin

I refer to your letter dated 22 October 2009, attaching the petition submitted to your Committee, signed by 2,097 concerned Australians, regarding the review by the Productivity Commission of the provisions relating to the parallel importation of books under the Copyright Act 1968.

The Government has not accepted the Productivity Commission’s recommendation to remove the existing parallel importation restrictions on books.

Australian book printing and publishing is under strong competitive pressure from international online booksellers and the Government has formed the view that this pressure is likely to intensify. In addition, the technology of electronic books (e-books) will continue to improve, with further innovations and price reductions expected.

In the circumstances of intense competition from online books and e-books, the Government has judged that changing the regulations governing book imports would be unlikely to have any material effect on the availability of books in Australia.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Aircraft Noise: Sutherland Shire

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 22 October 2009 enclosing a petition from residents of Kareela about aircraft noise in the Sutherland Shire area.

Upon receipt of your letter, I requested Airservices Australia look into the issues raised by the
residents of Kareela. In response, I am able to advise the following:

Sydney Airport commenced its Runway End Safety Area (RESA) project in October 2008. During the first stage of the RESA project operations on the east-west runway were limited, leading to a decrease in the number of overflights experienced by areas to the west of the airport.

In June 2009, the first phase of the RESA project was finished allowing arrivals on the east-west runway to recommence. The reopening of the western end of the runway also allowed for the full range of noise sharing modes for Sydney Airport to again be available between the hours of 6 am to 7 am and 7 pm to 11 pm.

Full noise sharing under the airport’s Long Term Operating Plan (LTOP) will resume once the RESA project is completed in April 2010.

A review of flights operating in the vicinity of Kareela since June 2009 indicates that while the overall number of flights experienced during July increased from 1883 to 1992 since then flights have decreased, falling to 1532 in October.

The curfew arrangements that apply at Sydney Airport are established under the Sydney Airport Curfew Act 1995 (the Act). While the Act prohibits aircraft movements at the airport during the curfew hours of 11 pm and 6 am it does, however, allow for movements by emergency aircraft, and a limited list of other aircraft which are restricted to landing over Botany Bay.

I remain committed to maintaining the curfew and LTOP at Sydney Airport and believe the existing arrangements ensure the safety of air travel and provide a good balance between community and commercial needs.

Thank you for raising this matter.

From the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 17 September 2009 to the Prime Minister regarding a petition, submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions, for the nation of East Timor to receive an award in the Order of Australia. As the minister responsible for honours, I have been asked to respond on behalf of the Prime Minister. I note that there is an expectation that Ministers will respond to a referred petition within 90 days of presentation.

The courage and loyalty shown by the ‘creados’ of East Timor, in support of Australian troops during 1941-43, was remarkable. I am also aware of the commendable work undertaken by the Mary McKillop East Timor Mission in raising awareness of the critical contribution made by the East Timorese people during the War. However, an award in the Order of Australia is not an appropriate form of recognition in this circumstance. The Order was established to recognise the merit of individuals as part of a living society of honour and its constitution precludes group awards.

However, the Government is currently giving some consideration to other, more appropriate, forms of recognition.

This letter has been copied to the Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon John Faulkner, and the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the Hon Alan Griffin MP, for their information.

From the Special Minister of State, Senator Ludwig

Pharmaceutical Benefits

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2009 regarding a petition submitted for consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions by the New South Wales community of Wattle Grove/Holsworthy concerning access to the supply of pharmaceutical benefits by an approved pharmacist.

I note that Chen’s Pharmacy at Wattle Grove cannot be approved to supply medicines subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) as it is not the required distance from the nearest PBS approved pharmacy, as specified in the Pharmacy Location Rules (the Rules). The purpose of the Rules is to ensure that all Australians have access to medicines subsidised under the PBS through an effective, efficient and well-distributed community pharmacy network. In particular, the Rules encourage improved local access to pharmacies for rural and remote communities.
In certain situations I have a discretionary power to approve the pharmacist under the National Health Act 1953 (the Act) where the application of the Rules will result in a community being left without reasonable access to a PBS approved pharmacy. The pharmacists at Wattle Grove, Mr and Mrs Chen, have requested that I exercise my discretionary power and approve them to supply subsidised medicines at their pharmacy.

As required under the Act, I must decide whether to consider Mr and Mrs Chen’s request by 18 December 2009, three months after it was made. If I decide to consider their request, I have a further three months to decide whether I will exercise my discretionary power and approve the pharmacists to supply PBS medicines at the Wattle Grove pharmacy.

In deciding whether the Wattle Grove/Holsworthy community has reasonable access to the supply of PBS medicines, I will examine a range of factors including why Mr and Mrs Chen’s application did not satisfy the requirements of the Rules, the characteristics and demographics of the local area, the community’s current level of access to the supply of PBS medicines, and any other factors that are relevant to this matter. Further information about my discretionary power under the Act is available by accessing my Department’s website at www.health.gov.au and using the search criterion ‘ACP A’.

I appreciate the strong interest and support from the local community and their representations will be taken into account as part of my consideration of this issue.

from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon

Air Traffic Noise: Beechboro

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 29 October 2009 enclosing a petition from residents of Beechboro about aircraft noise over Beechboro.

Upon receipt of your letter, I requested Airservices Australia examine the issue raised by the residents of Beechboro and am able to advise the following:

The sustained growth in aviation required to service the mining and tourism industries in Western Australia has seen an increased number of flights each year since 2000. Some aircraft departing on Runways 03 and 06 at Perth Airport are required to fly over the greater metropolitan area of Perth, which includes Beechboro.

The flight path over Beechboro is a longstanding procedure. It is only used when departures to the northwest are unable to transit directly through military airspace to the north of Perth. However, recent changes to aircraft arrival and departure procedures at Perth have resulted in some increases to the number of aircraft operating over Beechboro. These changes formed part of the Western Australia Route Review Project and were implemented to ease airspace congestion which had the potential to impact on safety.

Thank you for raising this matter.

from the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese

Human Rights: Falun Gong

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2009 referring a petition submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. In accordance with Standing Order 209(b), my response is as follows.

The Australian Government has taken a strong and consistent approach to engaging the Chinese Government on human rights, including in relation to Falun Gong Practitioners. The Australian Government continues to engage China on human rights, including persecution of Falun Gong practitioners through the Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue, the most recent round of which took place in Canberra in February 2009. The next round of the Human Rights Dialogue will take place in China in 2010.

The Government has made the point to China that it is important to guarantee both freedom of belief and freedom of religious activity without state interference. The Government has also expressed concern about reports that the Chinese authorities continue to suppress religious activities which they deem to be outside the scope of the state-controlled religious system. This would appear to
be inconsistent with the right of freedom of belief, including the right to observe, worship, practice and teach in accordance with that belief. The Australian Government has urged China to protect that right, and will continue to do so.

from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith

Hunting

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2009, under reference 232/398, concerning a petition to end recreational hunting on public lands and reserves.

The state and territory governments have primary responsibility for managing wildlife including hunting. The Australian Government becomes involved when the specimen is being exported, the activity occurs on Commonwealth land, or where there is a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance.

The Australian Government supports sustainable use of wildlife where the activity is adequately regulated to ensure that the harvest is ecologically sustainable, does not have a detrimental impact either on the harvested species or their ecosystems, is conducted in a humane manner and is compatible with other management objectives for the relevant area.

The Australian Government does not permit hunting or shooting by members of the public within Commonwealth reserves. Hunting on other public lands is a matter for the relevant state or territory government.

from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett

Lymphoedema

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2009 regarding the treatment of lymphoedema.

The petition that you refer to asks that lymphoedema be recognised as a chronic medical condition. For the purposes of the Chronic Disease Management (CDM) items (which replaced the former Enhanced Primary Care items in 2005) on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), a chronic (or terminal) medical condition is one that has been or is likely to be present for six months or longer, including but not limited to asthma, cancer, cardiovascular illness, diabetes mellitus, musculoskeletal conditions and stroke. The MBS does not list all possible medical conditions that are regarded as chronic medical conditions, and does not preclude lymphoedema from being considered as such. It is up to GPs to use their clinical judgement, taking into account both the eligibility criterion and the general guidance, to determine whether a patient with lymphoedema is eligible for treatment under the Medicare CDM items.

Under the CDM items, patients who have a chronic medical condition and complex care needs and are being managed by their GP under a GP Management Plan (GPMP item 721) and Team Care Arrangements (TCAs item 723), can be referred for up to five Medicare-rebatable allied health services (items 10950-10970) each calendar year. Specific categories of allied health professionals, including physiotherapists and occupational therapists who meet specific eligibility requirements, and who are registered with Medicare Australia and in private practice, are able to provide these CDM (individual) allied services.

The allied health services available under Medicare are not intended to fully cater for patients who require more intensive ongoing treatments. Rather, these Medicare services complement services provided by State and Territory Governments and increase access to private allied health services by making them more affordable.

The Australian Government also supports access to allied health services more generally through subsidies on private health insurance premiums and through targeted non-Medicare initiatives, such as the More Allied Health Services Program funded through rural Divisions of General Practice.

In addition to the CDM allied health (individual) services, patients with lymphoedema may be eligible for Medicare benefits in respect of monitoring and support services, provided by a practice nurse (or registered Aboriginal Health Worker) on behalf of a GP (MBS item 10997). This item is available to patients who have a chronic or terminal medical condition and are being managed by
their GP under a GPMP, TCAs, or a multidisciplinary care plan. Activities that a practice nurse or other health professional may undertake on behalf of and under the supervision of a GP are not prescribed but must be within the nurse’s professional competencies. A maximum of five services can be claimed per patient per calendar year.

The petition requests that provision be made within Medicare for the cost of compression garments. The Australian Government acknowledges that the cost of necessary medical aids and appliances can be a significant financial burden, particularly for people living with chronic disease.

Medical aids/equipment are provided by the States and Territories as part of their responsibility for the provision of health services. The Australian Government’s role under the current health funding arrangements is to provide health grants to the State and Territory Governments. It is a matter for each State and Territory to determine its priorities and the funds that are allocated between the many competing areas of government spending on health and hospital services. All State and Territory Governments operate aids and appliances programs to assist residents with the cost and/or provision of appropriate equipment, aids and appliances in the community setting.

In addition, some private health funds provide benefits for aids and appliances, but are free to determine the nature of health related goods that attract benefits and any restrictions or limitations on such benefits. The payment of benefits usually depends upon the insured person holding a policy that covers aids and appliances.

The petition also requests the establishment of regional and rural lymphoedema treatment centres, funding for a public education campaign, central register of lymphoedema treatment practitioners and a national lymphoedema helpline and website.

The Australian Government recognises that our health system is in need of reform to meet a range of long-term challenges, including access to services, the growing burden of chronic disease, population ageing, workforce shortages, and the escalating costs of new health technologies. The recently released report of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, A Healthy Future for All Australians, provided a long-term, comprehensive view and health reform options.

For your interest, page 22 of the report (Recommendations/Restoring people to better health and independent living/paragraph 41) recommends affordable access to aids and other devices to be considered under reforms to integrated safety net arrangements.

The Australian Government has established a website to enable members of the public and organisations in the health sector to engage with the Government about options for health reform. It is seeking debate which is realistic about the reforms that need to be undertaken, as well as about the cost implications and how they are to be funded. Views can be provided at www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publication.pdf?content/home.

I trust that the above information is of assistance.

from the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon

Granite Belt Orchards

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 25 November 2009 referring me to a petition on protecting Queensland fruit orchards from flying foxes which had been lodged with your committee.

The petition raises issues about the impact of flying foxes on agricultural production, and strategies for managing flying foxes, which are primarily the responsibilities of state and territory governments. I am responding to you as Australian Government Minister responsible for matters concerning the environment. I understand that Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke MP, has a legislative responsibility for agriculture and will respond separately.

The Australian Government’s responsibilities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) focus on
the protection of certain matters of national environmental significance, which include nationally listed threatened species.

The Australian Government’s involvement with flying-foxes is confined to those species that are listed under the EPBC Act. The only EPBC-listed flying-fox species occurring in the Southern Darling Downs area is the Grey-headed Flying-fox, which is listed as vulnerable. Disturbance or relocation of populations requires consideration under the EPBC Act.

Other flying-fox species that may occur in the area, the Black Flying-fox (Pteropus alecto) and the Little Red Flying-fox (Pteropus scapulatus), are not listed under the EPBC Act and are therefore primarily the responsibility of state government, except where they occur on Commonwealth land.

In eastern Australia particularly, diminishing habitat and reliable food sources growing in parks and gardens has forced flying fox camps into local neighbourhoods and orchards. The Australian Government supports the effective management of flying fox populations and is reviewing the EPBC Act’s Policy Statement for the Grey-headed flying fox to ensure it reflects current understanding of the potential effects of actions such as culling and relocating flying fox colonies.

The Policy Statement will complement a recently released draft National Recovery Plan: (http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/recovery/pteropus-poliocephalus.html) which is currently open for comment. Developed with the involvement of the relevant states, the draft Plan identifies threats and recovery actions to protect habitat critical to the survival of the species. Submissions will be taken into account in formulating both the Plan and Policy Statement.

Thank you, for writing on this matter.

from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett

Marriage

Dear Mrs Irwin

I refer to your letters dated 19 and 26 November 2009 seeking a written response to petitions submitted to your Committee on 16 and 23 November 2009 requesting that the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009 be opposed.

As you may be aware, the Bill was introduced in the Senate as a private senator’s bill by Federal Green’s Senator Hanson-Young on 24 June 2009. The Bill proposed to remove all discrimination from the Marriage Act 1961 on the basis of sexuality and gender identity and to permit marriage regardless of sex, sexuality and gender identity.

The Senate referred the Bill to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for inquiry and report on 25 June 2009. The Committee tabled its report on the Bill on 26 November 2009, recommending that the Bill not be passed.

The petitions suggest that the definition of marriage as ‘a union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life’ be maintained. The petition explains that to alter the definition of marriage to include same-sex ‘marriage’ as proposed by the Bill would be to change the very structure of society to the detriment of all, especially children. The Government is of the view that a range of factors contribute to supporting the well-being of children and society. For example, initiatives recognising and raising public awareness about human rights, the rights of children, the welfare of the family and the need for non-discrimination.

The Government’s clear view is that marriage is between a man and a woman. Support for the current definition of marriage in the Marriage Act 1961 was confirmed at the 45th ALP National Conference 2009 and is reflected in the ALP National Platform and Constitution 2009. The Rudd Government is committed to ensuring that all couples whether married or de facto do not suffer discrimination. The Government’s position is that the most appropriate way to achieve this is through the development of a nationally consistent framework for relationship recognition. These reforms are to be implemented consistently with the Government’s commitment to maintaining the definition of marriage.

I hope this information is of assistance to your Committee when considering these petitions.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

CHAMBER
Youth Homelessness

Dear Mrs Irwin,

Thank you for your letter of 19 November 2009 to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, about the petition regarding housing for young people at risk of homelessness. Minister Macklin has asked me to respond to you on her behalf as this issue is in my area of responsibility.

I appreciate the concerns of the people who have signed the petition about the number of youth who are homeless. Young people are particularly vulnerable as identified in the petition.

The Government has invested $48 million over the next two years for the Reconnect program. Reconnect provides early intervention support for young people aged between 12 and 18 years who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and aims to improve the level of engagement with their families, education, training, employment and the community. Reconnect is delivered by Local Government, and non-government providers, offering services such as counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to both the young person and their family.

There are currently 107 Reconnect services in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations around Australia.

More broadly on homelessness, I was proud to launch the White Paper on Homelessness with the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, in December 2008. Called The Road Home, the White Paper is the Government’s plan to reduce homelessness.

The Government has set two ambitious but achievable goals: to halve overall homelessness by 2020 and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020. State and Territory Governments have also committed to these targets through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, States and Territories and the Commonwealth have agreed to spend $1.1 billion to implement support services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The State and Territory Governments are responsible for the distribution of funding for homelessness support and service delivery in their jurisdictions. The States and Territories have agreed to the goals and targets set in the National Partnership on Homelessness to reduce homelessness and are required to spend the funding on initiatives to achieve these goals.

Young people feature significantly in these agreements.

This new funding includes $300 million announced with the States and Territories last year for the purchase of 731 new homes across Australia for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

In addition, under the Social Housing Initiative, as part of the National Building Economic Stimulus Plan, the Commonwealth Government has committed $5.64 billion to allow the construction of over 19,300 dwellings and to renovate more than 60,000 existing dwellings. This will help us to achieve the goals set out in the White Paper on Homelessness by providing more opportunities for people to access stable accommodation.

The Commonwealth Government is determined to reduce homelessness, not just through extra funding, but through reform. A different approach is required to assist people to get back on their feet and into secure housing, with the support they need for mainstream social and economic participation. We also aim to significantly reduce the number of people becoming homeless in the first place, or cycling in and out of homelessness.

I trust that this information demonstrates the commitment the Commonwealth Government has in facilitating a real reduction in homelessness. I genuinely appreciate the good work being done by the many individuals and organisations like the St John of God Foundation and their Horizon House in supporting homeless young people in our community.

Once again, thank you for writing on this important issue.

from the Minister for Housing, Ms Plibersek
Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 19 November 2009 on behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, concerning the petition regarding funding for the Australian Technical Colleges.

The Australian Government believes that existing education systems are well placed to educate and train students in the trades, and that available public resources should be used to strengthen current education and training systems. However, the Government undertook to honour existing funding agreements with the 24 Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) and work towards their integration into the broader education and training effort before the expiry of their agreements on 31 December 2009.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has consulted with local stakeholders, including industry, education and training sectors, and state and territory governments regarding future arrangements for each existing ATC. In each case the aim was to determine future programs in ways that best met the Government’s objective of expanding the provision of high quality pathways for Year 11 and 12 students covering senior secondary as well as technical education, and responding to the future skills needs of industry in the region.

The Department is currently in close consultations with the South Australian Government to determine the best option for the future of the ATC Spencer Gulf & Outback. It is a priority in these consultations to ensure that current students of the ATC are given priority consideration and that all students currently enrolled with the ATC are able to continue their study programs in 2010.

from the Minister for Education, Ms Gillard

Administration of Justice

Dear Mrs Irwin

I refer to your letter dated 26 November 2009 attaching three petitions relating to the Family Court submitted to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions.

The first and second petitions seek the removal of judicial officers pursuant to section 72(ii) of The Constitution. Section 72 provides for the removal of judicial officers, by the Governor-General in Council on an address from both Houses of the Parliament, in only the most serious of circumstances—namely, proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

As the judicial branch of the Australian Government, the federal courts are of fundamental importance to the Australian community and I take any dissatisfaction with them seriously. Where a legitimate and substantiated allegation of misbehaviour or incapacity is made against a federal judicial officer, that allegation should be treated seriously and given due consideration by the Parliament.

Complaints against the conduct of judicial officers that do not amount to the level set out in the Constitution are appropriately directed to the Head of Jurisdiction in the court concerned. I also note that, if a person is not satisfied with the outcome of a particular matter, the appropriate avenue of redress is through the appeals process.

The information contained in the two petitions is not sufficient to determine the nature of the alleged conduct. As a result, it is not possible to ascertain the seriousness of the complaint and therefore whether it is appropriately to be considered by the Parliament or the Head of Jurisdiction of the relevant court. It would also be difficult to assess the merits of the allegation.

The third petition seeks the enactment of laws defining the rights and obligations of a McKenzie friend in federal court proceedings. The petition requests that those laws be parallel to the provisions of the Family Law Rules 2004 on case guardians, including the right of audience but not the right to make written applications on behalf of a party.

A case guardian is permitted to do, for the benefit of the disabled party, anything permitted to be done by that party whereas a McKenzie friend is a person who is not an advocate, but sits beside the litigant at the bar table to take notes, make quiet suggestions and assist the litigant in presenting his or her case to the Court.

The Family Law Act 1975 and Federal Magistrates Act 1999 empower judges and magistrates or a majority of them to make rules in relation to
practice and procedure to be followed in family law courts. Whilst the Rules include provisions about case guardians, they do not directly address the position of McKenzie friends, who play a less formal role in legal proceedings. The Committee might like to inform the petitioner that he may bring his concerns about the application or clarity of the relevant court rules—including as these relate to McKenzie friends—to the attention of the Chief Justice of the Family Court or Chief Magistrate of the Federal Magistrates Court.

The third petition also seeks amendment of section 33 of the Judiciary Act 1903. This section gives the High Court the power to make certain orders or direct the issue of certain writs: The amendment is sought for the purpose of enabling ‘correction of judicial wrongs and errors in the High Court’. The amendment that would appear to be sought is already given effect by subsection 38(e) of the Judiciary Act. However, if a person is not satisfied with a decision of a court in a particular matter, the appropriate avenue of redress is through the appeals process.

I hope this information is of assistance to the Committee.

from the Attorney-General, Mr McClelland

Airport Noise

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 19 November 2009 enclosing the petition about flight path activity at Sydney Airport presented to the House of Representatives by the Member for Cook on 19 June 2009.

I note that the four points the petitioners wish to bring to the attention of the House relate to the issue of the implementation and use of certain Standard Terminal Arrival Routes (STARs) at Sydney Airport. This issue was discussed at length at both the meeting of the Implementation and Monitoring Committee (IMC), which oversees the Sydney Airport Long Term Operating Plan (LTOP), on Tuesday 22 September, and at the meeting of the Sydney Airport Community Forum (SACF) on Friday 25 September.

My replies to the three specific requests of the petition are as follows:

1. The Government fully supports noise sharing under the Sydney Airport LTOP. SACF and the LTOP IMC have been established as standing community consultative committees to oversee the implementation of the noise sharing principles.

2. Airservices Australia has undertaken to examine the reasons underlying the changes in patterns of aircraft overflight of the Cook electorate and to report back to me through the IMC and to SACF members.

3. I have asked my Department and Airservices to develop a paper scoping research into using new technologies to manage aircraft noise in ways that facilitate noise sharing while taking advantage of the gains in safety and efficiency that can be provided by advances in avionics.

Thank you for raising this matter.

from the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese

McMillan Electorate: Moe Infrastructure

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 26 November 2009 about a petition submitted regarding the relocation of the Moe Library and Latrobe Council Services Centre.

Funding of $2 million towards the Moe Community Hub building was announced as an election commitment by the Australian Government on 24 October 2007. The project is currently being considered by the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (the Department) for funding under the Better Regions Program.

The Better Regions Program will provide $176 million over four years to assist regional Australia with much-needed community facilities and services, identified by local communities as priorities for their regions.

The proposed Community Hub building will form part of the Latrobe City Council's proposed Moe Rail Precinct redevelopment, which is currently undergoing detailed design. The Community Hub building will provide a new library, mother and
child health centre, meeting rooms, internet cafe and gallery area. These services were identified as desirable in the precinct during extensive periods of community consultation by the Latrobe City Council.

I understand that the petition received by the Committee represents residents who object to the relocation of the library from its present site to the proposed Community Hub building. I will consider this issue in the context of advice from my Department on the proposal for funding under the Better Regions Program. However, the appropriate channel to express concerns is to the Latrobe City Council which is the proponent for the development.

Thank you for raising this matter.

from the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese

National Rental Affordability Scheme

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2009 to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, concerning a petition submitted for the consideration of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions regarding the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). Minister Macklin has asked me to respond to you as this issue is in my area of responsibility.

I appreciate the petitioners’ concern that NRAS applications should receive Local Government approval and that community consultation should also occur. It appears that petitioners have been misinformed about the process for NRAS developments. Development applications for houses to be part-funded under NRAS go through exactly the same process as any private (non-NRAS) development. NRAS developments are not exempt from local government rules and requirements.

The planning approval for any new NRAS development is made by the relevant local council in line with their usual practices, including community consultation where appropriate, and with reference to their requirements and town plans.

If residents of the suburb of Coombabah are dissatisfied by the general process for approval that applies to any new residential development in their suburb, I suggest that they direct these concerns to the local council.

While applicants under NRAS are not required to provide evidence that their proposals have obtained planning approval before they apply, they are required to sign a declaration which states that they will be fully compliant with the requirements of the Scheme. This includes compliance with planning laws.

Please also note that the National Rental Affordability Scheme Regulations 2008 require that each approved rental dwelling, and the management of it, complies at all times with the landlord, tenancy, building and health and safety laws of the State or Territory and Local Government area in which the dwelling is located.

The NRAS assessment process takes into consideration several aspects of development, including housing need in the area, as well as accessibility and sustainability outcomes. The decision-making process involves consultation with the State Government. The Commonwealth Government will not approve an application without State Government support.

Before a payment or refundable tax offset certificate will be provided, approved participants must indicate that they have complied with all local regulations and provide a copy of the certificate of occupancy, or equivalent, for each dwelling.

Providing NRAS approval and reserving an allocation allows applicants to forward plan and to include projects that will deliver dwellings over the four years of the Scheme. Furthermore, gaining approval under the Scheme may be a critical part of proceeding with the project and applicants may need or wish to secure this prior to applying for planning approval. Approval under the Scheme may also assist applicants to leverage finance.

Improving access to housing for families is a major priority for the Commonwealth Government and the Scheme will help increase the supply of more affordable rental homes. Rent for properties participating in the Scheme must be 20 per cent below the market rate, and only eligible tenants
on low to moderate incomes can be housed in NRAS homes. Eligible tenants may be single people, couples or families with children and may include key workers who make a significant contribution to the community, such as nurses, police officers and trades people.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write on behalf of the petitioners.

from the Minister for Housing, Ms Plibersek

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.36 pm)—On behalf of all members of the Standing Committee on Petitions, I would like to place on record that we are very happy with the quick responses that we have been receiving from ministers.

COMMITTEES

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Report

Mr BEVIS (Brisbane) (8.37 pm)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I present the committee’s report entitled Defence Subcommittee visit to East Timor.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr BEVIS—The Defence subcommittee visited East Timor—Timor-Leste—in the second half of last year for a short one-day visit. It was an important event in respect of the Defence committee’s work, and well attended. Some 14 members of the committee participated in that one-day visit.

The work of Australian Defence personnel in Timor-Leste has been very significant now over quite a period of time, and it is likely to extend into the future. Members of the committee did believe it was important both as a bipartisan sign of support for the work that is there and also as an opportunity to better understand the activities being undertaken to visit physically. With such a large number, it would have been difficult logistically to remain overnight. It was difficult enough, I suspect for those who had to host us to look after the substantial number on the visit. In that respect I would like to place on the record again my appreciation for the cooperation and support of the Australian post and the Australian ambassador, His Excellency Peter Heyward.

The visiting members of the subcommittee attended the Defence Cooperation Program headquarters, and Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Ferndale and his officers provided a very good briefing for those on the committee on the activities that they were undertaking, including their work with the development of the Timor-Leste defence forces and the construction of the DCP headquarters building itself. The committee also visited the International Stabilisation Force headquarters, and met with the ISF commander, Brigadier Bill Sowry.

It is interesting in these sorts of events, having had briefings here in Australia in the committee on the work that is being undertaken there and having read many accounts in the public domain of these matters, that nothing quite compares with the opportunity to be in the presence of those involved in this work and to see firsthand the conditions in which they are operating.

In that respect, I think perhaps the most interesting part of the trip—certainly for me—was when we then went to the training centre at Metinaro—the officer in command there is Major Barry Rhodes—to see the work that is actually being done on the ground in a very fine facility, I have to say. The quality of the facility that has been constructed there by the Australian government for use in the training and support of the local defence forces is first class. It gave all of us on the committee an opportunity not just to talk with the ADF personnel involved but with the local defence and police recruits.
about what they needed, how they saw the development of their country and also how they saw the assistance that was being provided by the Australian Defence Force.

It is fair to say that the training there covers a wide range of activities, from some of the most basic defence and security related training through to more sophisticated activities. Whilst we were at Metinaro we did get the opportunity to talk to some of the students of English language who were present and also the English instruction teacher who, if memory serves me correctly, was a former New South Wales school teacher. The work that is being done there is vital to the development of basic infrastructure in Timor-Leste. On a broader point, it was also possible as we were driving across the island, to get a better understanding of the basic infrastructure needs of Timor-Leste. They are significant and should not be underestimated.

I want to place on record my thanks to the members of the subcommittee, who gave their time to participate. I particularly want to record my thanks to Wing Commander David Ashworth, who more than anybody ensured that the logistics for the occasion ran seamlessly. David was the Defence officer attached to the committee last year and, for his sins, is now here doing a real job back at the ADF. But we greatly appreciated his support and hard work in ensuring that delegation trip went off without a hitch.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (8.42 pm)—On 5 August 2009 I joined with members of the Defence subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in a brief visit to Timor-Leste. The objective was to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by our ADF personnel and to observe the development of Timor-Leste defence forces as Timor-Leste matures as a nation to a future where it no longer requires Australian forces as a part of its domestic security support arrangements.

For a nation that has been ravaged by events of the past, Timor-Leste is making solid progress since independence toward a more stable security environment. That progress has been driven by the tenacity and bravery of the men and women of Timor-Leste under the resilient leadership of the President, Dr Jose Ramos Horta, and supported by several nations and NGOs in which Australia has played an important role.

At the Defence Cooperation Program headquarters in Dili, Ambassador Heyward briefed the committee on Timor-Leste’s progress and challenges, and gave an explanation of its ongoing relationship and links with Australia and a detailed briefing on the many organisations—governmental and nongovernmental—engaged in Timor-Leste’s ongoing development as well as the country’s neighbourhood and its resource base, economy and trade.

Senior DCP Adviser to the Timor-Leste Defence Force, Lieutenant Colonel Steven Ferndale, briefed the committee on the DCP’s role in assisting to create and sustain a professional military culture. A long-term goal would be to enable the Timor-Leste Defence Force to reach a standard of training and effectiveness that could see it contributing internationally. The briefing also explained how the DCP interacts with the International Stabilisation Force and the Timor-Leste Defence Force. The committee were informed that the DCP’s major projects included the establishment of the Specialist Training Wing, the Maritime Security Program, improvements to logistics management, communications capability and the construction of buildings.

At the International Stabilisation Force Headquarters at Camp Phoenix, Dili, we were briefed by Commander ISF, Brigadier
Bill Sowry and his team from the Joint Task Force 631. Briefings covered the ISF’s mission, tasks, organisation, disposition and challenges. We were advised that the ISF was becoming more engaged in liaison and nation building alongside the NGOs through the establishment and use of liaison officers.

The visit to the Timor-Leste Defence Force Nicolau Lobato Training Centre at Metinaro gave the committee an opportunity to meet with trainees, to understand their backgrounds and their reasons in joining the Timor-Leste Defence Force. I was impressed with the newly constructed facilities and the briefing from the Officer Commanding the Specialist Training Wing, Major Barry Rhodes, on the training program, which includes a comprehensive English-language training program. This is an integral part of the DCP strategy, alongside the development of a training culture that will underpin a professional military culture.

In conclusion, the International Stabilisation Force’s mission is to ‘support the government of Timor-Leste in maintaining stability and the development of its security sector in order to allow the continuing growth of Timor-Leste as a stable economic nation’. I am happy to report that this is being achieved and that the strengthening of the Timor-Leste Defence Force will enable Australia and others to reduce their commitment to the ISF and other supporting infrastructure. In recognition of the above, the President of Timor Leste, Dr Jose Ramos Horta, today presented nearly 200 Navy, Army and Air Force personnel with the Timor-Leste Solidarity Medal and expressed his nation’s gratitude to those personnel who are about to return home. To quote President Ramos:

Together we have been able to restore peace and security for the people who so much deserved it … As you depart for Australia I wish to thank you for the services you have provided us on behalf of the Australian people.

I should also note that the ISF Commander, Commodore Stuart Mayer, whom I first met on board HMAS Anzac during the wreath laying ceremony over HMAS Sydney on 16 April 2008, was awarded the medal of merit, the medhala de merito, one of the highest accolades that can be presented by the President, becoming one of only a select few people from outside Timor-Leste to receive the medal.

I thank the members of the committee, in particular Wing Commander David Ashworth, and those who made the time as informative as it could have been. Most of all I thank the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, who carry out their role with absolute distinction and do Australia proud. Along with the chair and on behalf of the committee, I would like to personally thank the Ambassador, Mr Peter Heyward, and his staff at the Australian Embassy in Dili; the ADF staff at the Defence Cooperation Program; the members of Joint Task Force 631 and No. 34 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force for their support and assistance during this trip.

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Report

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (8.46 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, I present the committee’s report, incorporating a dissenting report, entitled A time for change: yes/no? Inquiry into the machinery of referendums, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.
Mr DREYFUS—It is my pleasure to present the report A time for change: yes/no? Inquiry into the machinery of referendums. This is the fourth report of the committee for this parliament.

It is over a decade since Australia last held a referendum, over thirty years since there was a successful referendum to change the Constitution, and it is nearly a century since the introduction of the yes/no pamphlet as the principal means of informing voters in a referendum. This inquiry concerned the machinery of referendums—principally how voters are engaged in a referendum and how the yes/no cases are communicated. There have been many changes in effective communication methods over the last century, and yet our method of communicating to voters during a referendum has remained relatively unchanged over this time.

In 1912, when the requirement was introduced for a pamphlet outlining the yes/no cases for constitutional change, it was considered an innovative development in the way in which the government communicated with electors. In today’s array of communication technologies and expectations of public debate, we could hardly see such a pamphlet as innovative. Nearly a century later, it is appropriate to ask whether there is a more effective way of informing and engaging the Australian public about proposed constitutional change.

The requirement for constitutional change is rightly set high. Section 128 of the Constitution requires that a majority of electors in a majority of states approve of the proposal. It is therefore critical that electors understand the proposal being put to them so that they can make an informed decision at a referendum. It is also clear that a lack of understanding plays a significant part in an elector’s decision to vote no. Indeed, the 1999 republic referendum campaign demonstrated this plainly with the ‘Don’t know; vote no’ slogan against change. It is the view of the committee that, while the distribution of a yes/no pamphlet has provided a reasonable starting point for communicating with voters, it is the minimum of what might be needed and is no longer appropriate or adequate as the sole material provided to electors.

As such, the committee has made 17 recommendations to improve the referendum process. These innovations recognise that in the 21st century a range of communication approaches are required to inform and engage with voters. First, the committee recommends amendments to the act to require that a yes/no pamphlet is posted to every household rather than each elector. This change has been long supported by the Australian Electoral Commission. Additionally the current restriction on the word limit of the yes/no arguments should be removed from the act. It was agreed that parliamentarians should continue to authorise the yes/no arguments. Parliamentarians are elected representatives and are responsible and accountable to the Australian people. It is appropriate that they retain responsibility for authorising the official yes/no arguments.

In seeking to provide a more flexible and adaptable approach, the committee has recommended that a referendum panel be established for each referendum. The panel would be responsible for promoting the referendum and educating voters regarding the arguments. This would include determining the word limit of the yes/no pamphlet, as well as providing background material to electors on the referendum proposal.

These changes mean that there would be more than one way to communicate with electors before a referendum. The yes/no pamphlet would continue to be provided to electors and this would serve as a guaranteed minimum for referendum material. However,
additional material, using a range of communica-
tion technologies, could be more effec-
tively targeted to different groups of electors. The panel would comprise a maximum of eight persons, and should include a representa-
tive of the Australian Electoral Commis-
sion. The method of appointment to the panel should ensure independence and biparti-
sanship, and the government would determine the budget for the panel.

Further, it is clear that many Australians are not familiar with the Constitution. The committee has recommended that the Austra-
lian government develop and implement a national civics education program to enhance the engagement of the public in democratic processes and to improve knowledge and understanding of the Constitution. The title of this report is *A time for change: yes/no?* The report concerns the opportunity to change our Constitution. It does not promote change but acts to ensure that the opportunity for change is fair and represents the informed views of voters. We can and should do better in educating and engaging voters in the referen-
dum process and so, yes, it is time to change the machinery we use for referen-
dums.

I thank those who participated in commit-
tee hearings and roundtables and provided submissions to the inquiry. I also thank the secretariat for their work. And finally I thank the other members of the committee for their dedication and contribution to the inquiry. In particular I thank the inquiry secretary, Serica Mackay and research officer Angela Arundell, and also Anna Dacre, Sharon Bryant, Claire Young and Ozi Kosemehmetoglu.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (8.52 pm)—This is one of the few reports of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Le-
gal and Constitutional Affairs which have a dissenting report from a number of opposi-
tion members. While there is a dissenting report, I think that one ought to recognise that the process of the inquiry, with the roundtable, was very positive. There was a lot of initiative expressed by many people, and the committee worked well together de-
spite the fact that at the end, when one was considering the deliberations emanating from the roundtable, members of the opposition found it necessary to lodge a dissenting re-
port.

There is no doubt that the Australian Con-
stitution is the foundation on which our Aus-
tralian democracy is created. We have free-
dom; we have stability; we have a way of life that makes us the envy of people around the world. Consequently, any attempt to tamper with our Constitution or to interfere with the process of referenda to alter our Constitution ought to be undertaken only after the most careful consideration. Consequently, while the concept of a discussion on streamlining the process of constitutional referenda cer-
tainly is something in which all of us ought to participate, on balance the opposition members of the committee—or those who signed the dissenting report—could not go along with the majority view as expressed by the chairman. I would like to join the chair-
man in thanking the inquiry secretariat and indeed the committee secretary for the excel-
 lent service which the committee received, as always, when preparing the report entitled *A time for change: yes/no?*

In the time that is available to me, I would just like to mention briefly that the opposi-
tion members who signed the dissenting re-
port wanted to make a comment about a number of recommendations. With respect to recommendation 1, it was felt that the gener-
ality of the recommendation calling for an amendment of the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984 to improve the process was unhelpful, and it did not detail what amendments should be made. It was felt that this recommendation could not be accepted.
Recommendation 2, which referred to the removal of the word restrictions of the yes/no cases, was a matter of concern because the recommendation did not preclude a decrease in the word limit.

Recommendation 3, if adopted, would have resulted in the yes/no booklet only being delivered to each household. As we know, in a democracy not everyone in every household necessarily agrees on everything. It was felt by opposition members that if individual electors did not receive a yes/no case then it could be that electors, who had a responsibility to participate in the referendum process, would not necessarily each receive a list of the cases in favour of change and, of course, against change.

With respect to recommendation 6, while opposition members generally agreed with the recommendation for the development and implementation of a national civics education program, it was felt that the recommendation would be enhanced if it included provision for such a program to be developed and delivered in conjunction with non-government organisations currently promoting and operating education programs about the Australian Constitution. Such organisations, as was indicated in the dissenting report, could include CEFA and the Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies.

Recommendations 7, 8 and 9 referred to a referendum panel. The feeling was that such a panel would be unelected and unaccountable, whereas all of us are elected to the parliament and we are at least responsible to the Australian people. Consequently, recommendations 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 could not be supported because they referred to the referendum panel. Recommendations 4, 5, 11, 16 and 17 are supported.

This was an extremely useful and worthwhile inquiry. We were all pleased to be able to participate because—let us face it—democracy is a fragile flower and our Constitution is the foundational structure which makes sure that we are the wonderful country that we are. That is why any attempt to tamper with our Constitution or processes ought to be carefully scrutinised.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Does the member for Isaacs wish to move a motion in accordance with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (8.57 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Report: Referral to Main Committee
Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (8.57 pm)—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

WILD RIVERS (ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT) BILL 2010
First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Abbott.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (8.58 pm)—The Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010 is, I would like to think, an important and significant attempt to give the Indigenous people of Cape York back their birthright, because the Queensland government, through the application of the wild rivers legislation to the rivers of Cape York, has effectively taken away from the Indigenous people of Cape...
York the ability to use what we say is their land in the way that they would like. We understand, throughout this parliament, that the great challenge is to ensure that Aboriginal people have the same economic opportunities that other Australians do. We understand that the great challenge is to enable them to use their land not just as a spiritual asset but as an economic asset, because, if they cannot use their land, it is not really theirs. That is the problem with the Queensland wild rivers legislation.

In moving the historic apology two years ago, the Prime Minister said:

… unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong.

In making that statement, the Prime Minister was absolutely right: unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong. Yet, paradoxically, on the same day that the Rudd government subscribed to the International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Bligh government in Queensland applied the wild rivers legislation to the significant rivers of Cape York—effectively blocking Aboriginal people from developing their land in the catchments of the Archer, Stewart and Lockhart rivers in Cape York.

I lead the Liberal and National coalition in this parliament. The Liberal and National parties in this parliament are the traditional defenders of the rights of the states, but the truth is that where a state government has erred in a very significant way and where the national government has the ability to correct that error, it should do so. Under section 51(xxvi) of the Constitution we in this parliament have the power to make laws for the people of any race, and I think we should make laws to ensure that the Indigenous people of Cape York are given back their birthright in respect of their land. That is why I have moved this private members’ bill.

As I said, the great challenge is to ensure that Aboriginal people are not just honoured as the first citizens of this country, are not just honoured as the first Australians, but actually enjoy full participation in our society. They will never enjoy full participation in our society if they are not able to start a business, to own a home and to earn an income in the same way that other Australians take for granted. Yet how can they do that if in the land that they love, in the land where they and their ancestors have lived for millennia, they are prevented by yet another layer of bureaucracy from doing what the rest of us take for granted? That is why this legislation is important.

I know that the last thing the Rudd government would want to do is to pick a fight with the Bligh Labor government in Queensland, but I think the Prime Minister was sincere when he made that apology. I think he was sincere when he said that the symbolism of the apology had to be accompanied by practical action to help Aboriginal people to lead a better life. So, in the spirit of bipartisanship, in the same spirit in which the Prime Minister invited the then opposition leader to participate in the war cabinet on housing, I invite the Prime Minister to think seriously about making time for this legislation to be debated and voted upon. If he thinks there is a better way of doing it, I am not proud. I am happy to concede a better way of doing it, but something must be done— (Time expired)

Bill read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Sexualisation of Girls in the Media

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.04 pm)—I move:

That the House:

(1) notes with concern the increasing sexualisation and objectification of girls in mainstream media;

(2) recognises that both media and peer influences contribute to the sexualisation of girls including:

(a) television, music videos, magazines, music lyrics, movies, cartoons, clothing, toys, computer games and the internet; and

(b) attitudes of peers and family;

(3) notes with concern the potential negative consequences of the sexualisation of girls on children and young adults, including negative body image, eating disorders, low self esteem, mental illness, poor physical health and gender role stereotyping;

(4) believes further research is necessary to understand the full effects that early sexualisation and objectification of girls in the mainstream media has on children and young adults;

(5) urges governments, publishers, broadcasters, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to:

(a) work together to review and develop appropriate standards and industry guidelines to address the sexualisation of children and limit its negative impact; and

(b) assist parents and children to understand and manage the influence of sexualisation of girls in the mainstream media and associated negative consequences.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms Vanvakinou—I second the motion.

Ms RISHWORTH—I am very pleased to rise tonight to move this motion, because the increasing sexualisation of our girls through mass media has become of increasing concern to me. Having raised this issue publicly over the last few weeks, I have come to appreciate that this is a concern shared by many people—most of all, parents who feel that they are at a loss when it comes to moderating the images and the messages that their children are exposed to. Whether it is the Bratz dolls, who are wearing fishnets, heavy makeup and boob tubes and are targeted at young girls, the music video clips that depict women gyrating around fully clothed male singers that play alongside the Saturday morning cartoons or the pre-teen magazine ads for sexy lingerie, we have all seen confronting examples of disturbing messages that are being sent to young children through the mass media: a message that is telling women and girls that being sexy is the only thing that defines who they are.

My own decision to speak out publicly on this issue was made after watching many of my friends trying to navigate through this area with their own children. Through them I could see that ensuring that the messages that their children were exposed to were age appropriate was becoming more and more difficult. It goes without saying that it is not just children who are absorbing messages from general advertising, but what I find particularly disturbing is the increasing stronger and more persistent message being sent to girls through toys, magazines, clothes, cartoons and the internet that they need to be sexual objects. A very topical illustration of this—and this has been reported on recently—is the My-Minx website, which is gaining popularity amongst pre-teen girls. On this website young girls are encouraged to create their online profile, or avatar, selecting features like breast and lip size, as well as skin colour and hairstyle. This online persona, or Minx, is then required to be dressed and can buy lingerie and designer clothes from outlets using fake ‘pink pounds’ from an account which needs to be topped up with mo-
bile phone credit. Having dressed their persona, users can then take their Minx to clubs, earn money by working as a stripper and increase their Minx’s happiness rating by getting plastic surgery. I think everyone in this House would find that is not the message that we want to be sending to our young children.

While adults are hopefully capable of critically reflecting on and evaluating games such as this one and other general advertising, we know that younger children are more likely to accept the behaviour depicted in these false realities and, through the mass media, more generally accept it as a norm. It is not difficult to understand and see that this exposure is having a negative influence on both young girls’ self-perceptions and relationships to peers.

The findings of research and academic work into the consequences of the sexualisation and objectification of young girls are quite alarming. In response to public concern in this area, the American Psychological Association recently outlined the impacts that it can have: negative self esteem, appearance anxiety, eating disorders, more depressed moods and depression, and negative effects on cognitive functioning. Certainly, in some accounts that I have heard these have a significant impact on a young person’s life.

From the correspondence and support I have received, I know that these fears are shared by many. To mention just one, I would like to mention Mr Andrew Lines, a teacher from a school in my electorate who recently contacted me, highlighting his concerns about the effect that objectification of women in the mass media is having not on women but on the attitudes of young boys, especially in the way he sees them treat girls and women. Mr Lines’s concerns have prompted him to develop a school program called The Rite Journey, which seeks to help young people develop into self-aware, responsible and resilient adults.

Since raising this issue I have been overwhelmed by the support of parents, psychologists, teachers and authors who have expressed their support and concern. In particular I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr Amy Slater, a researcher from the Flinders University near my electorate, for her assistance and patience in helping me understand some of these complex issues and the negative impacts that will be felt by the next generation. In collaboration with her colleague Professor Marika Tiggeman, Dr Slater is conducting much-needed research into the negative impacts on young people of this disturbing message. This motion before the House recognises that this is a complex issue, but it also recognises that, as a society, we need to start actively addressing this issue.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (9.09 pm)—There are many wise words about how a childhood shapes a man or woman irrevocably and for life. One of my favourites comes from Nigerian author Ben Okri, who said:

We plan our lives according to a dream that come to us in our childhood, and we find that life alters our plans. And yet, at the end, from a rare height, we also see that our dream was our fate.

Our job as parents and leaders in society and the community is to make sure that we do everything possible to ensure that positive dreams come to our young people—especially our girls—and I think that that quote provides a good sense of the critical importance of childhood and the way it shapes a future.

The sexualisation of girls is all around us and it is damaging our youth—bras and wet-shine lip gloss for five year olds; see-through lace, Tweety Bird G-strings, plunging necklines and full make-up kits for eight-to-12 year olds. It even leads through to the car
advertisements, where we see a man who gets the top-of-the-line sports car and then a glamorous woman to ride in it—two possessions to be acquired. Sexualisation occurs when a person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour to the exclusion of other characteristics and when a person is portrayed only as a sex object. This debate is not about sexual liberation—the freedom of women to have the sexual relationships they choose where and when they choose—we all have our individual views about these things. What this is about is the corporate exploitation of children’s sexuality. It is not the sexuality itself but the sickening falsification and then the mass marketing of children as sexual beings that hurts us all.

I had a look at the current issues of Dolly and Girlfriend. ‘Dolly doctor’ this month has been asked about how you get rid of cellulite, how you get rid of big breasts, how you get rid of the freckles on your face and how you get surgery to get rid of the scars on your knees. The cover of the February issue of Girlfriend, which I think is only aimed at primary school and early high school, has a girl of somewhere between 13 and 23—the level of airbrushing makes it impossible to tell—wearing an off-the-shoulder dress and a come-hither look. One of the stories featured is how to be the girl who gets the guy that everyone wants.

As a society we are visually absorbed; it is all about how you look. And to a certain extent we recognise and lament this fact, and some of us from time to time feel the need to embrace it and jump on the bandwagon. It is a hugely conflicted and contentious area that challenges women of all ages, but it should not challenge children. Children are being bombarded with huge volumes of graphic sexual content and they simply do not have the maturity to process or understand the images or the messages. What are young girls to make of all this? There is a clear message which associates physical appearance and buying the right products with being sexy and successful. These lessons learned early will shape identity values, sexual attitudes and the capacity to love and connect with other people.

A woman I know who is the mother of three girls recalls when her oldest, who is now 25, came to her when in primary school, wanting to know why she was not as pretty and little as the girls on TV. Teen clothing manufacturers have introduced a zero size for women in America. What does that say to women—that anything in a positive number is a failure? Could we imagine a zero size for men? The message that our mass media and, more importantly, the advertisers who are their revenue stream, are giving to children is that sex has nothing to do with pleasure, desire or intimacy and everything to do with the things you consume and the things you buy. In this universe, the space in our brain where we should be developing sympathy and understanding is not nearly as important as the space in our shopping malls.

When children are imbued with adult sexuality, it is imposed on them rather than chosen by them. There is so much evidence of the sexualisation of women and girls in television, music videos, movies, magazines and sports media. The next step is self-objectification, where girls actually think of their own bodies as objects to satisfy others’ desires, as objects to be evaluated for their appearance. The research tells us that sexualisation and objectification undermine confidence, comfort and self-esteem, leading to a host of negatives: shame, anxiety and self-disgust. This in turn leads to eating disorders and depression. There is evidence that young women who hold the conventional feminine beliefs—avoiding conflict and valuing being nice, sweet, pretty and thin—are more likely to be depressed. This debate is about the current and future emotional, physical and psy-
chological health of our girls. In telling our girls they can be anything, are we actually demanding that they be everything? In a world where girls face paralysing pressure to be perfect and where competitive pressures shape such a large part of who we are, surely we can allow girls the freedom to be children.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (9.14 pm)—I would like to begin by congratulating the member for Kingston for bringing to the House this evening this very important motion on the sexualisation and objectification of girls in the mainstream media. The relationship between modern media and our children is of ever-increasing importance to us all. It is a complicated issue that becomes more challenging as the media and corporate interests seek new and innovative ways to influence and encourage the thoughts and behaviour of children and, in particular, young girls.

I speak to this motion this evening as a mother of two teenagers. I am keenly aware of this issue and watch with a degree of anxiety as both my children grapple with the pressures of their adolescence. I watch as they try to keep up with the latest fads and fashions, and I have watched with concern as they and their peers have been enticed by the many forms of media that target them and attempt to sell them images and lifestyle choices that are well beyond their years.

As parents we strive to make our children feel happy and confident despite the media’s constant influence on their image and lifestyle choices. But it is a difficult battle given that you are also up against peer group pressure, which is itself heavily influenced by television, the fashion industry, the IT industry and of course the internet. Most vulnerable to these pressures are young girls, and it is my 15-year-old daughter and her peers that I have in mind when speaking to this motion. It is the fragility of how they perceive themselves physically and how that relates to their sense of self-esteem and self-worth that is the essence of this motion tonight.

Children begin to pick up messages at a very young age. Therefore the messages we as parents and as a society send them become critical to their development. The level of sexualisation and objectification of young girls in particular needs scrutiny from this House precisely because it can have negative consequences, consequences that we all know about and are concerned about: negative body image that leads to eating disorders, low self-esteem that can lead to mental illness, and gender role stereotyping that can lay many traps for the unsuspecting young mind still in the developmental phase.

I recall some years ago standing in the children’s clothing section of our local Kmart store. I was mortified to see hanging on the racks little bralettes, with matching undies, on sale for girls as young as five. While some see this as cute and harmless, it is actually a new frontier in children’s fashion. I objected to the availability of this attire for young girls, yet many parents would have bought it, encouraged further by the many glossy girlie magazines and supermodel reality TV shows that reinforce and in fact normalise and set the trends that make their way onto the clothes racks of our stores. Well-meaning parents become unwittingly complicit in the sexualisation and objectification of their young girls.

I am not suggesting we should regulate the personal choices parents make for their children’s day-to-day dress. But I do urgently wish to pose the questions: is this acceptable; what are the societal outcomes of dressing girls as young as five in bralettes or bras; and who is accountable? In its report Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media, the Senate Standing Committee on the Envi-
ronment, Communications and the Arts made a number of important findings. The report said:

Narrow or stereotypical portrayals of body type, beauty and women were commonly identified as the major source of sexualisation of children.

While the report acknowledged methodological limitations in accurately linking the media and the sexualisation of children, it noted:

… the report’s findings may be cautiously applied to at least conclude that some level or preponderance of sexual material in advertising and media content has the potential to contribute to, and perhaps even cause, emotional and physical damage to children.

Many of the submissions to this inquiry were from individuals, grandparents and parents. As one parent submitted:

Childhood is a time of joy and innocence, and this should be an absolute right for all our children. They become adults soon enough, and childhood is a time to be cherished.

I strongly agree with this. Ultimately, however, this issue is about responsibility. This motion is important because we have a collective responsibility as legislators to hold to account those who influence but also profit from children and young people. It is their responsibility to adhere to appropriate standards and industry guidelines. We must therefore work together with the industries concerned so that children and parents can be assisted in managing and understanding the influence of sexualisation of girls. Ultimately our aim must be to give our children and indeed our young people every chance—

(Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (9.19 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution tonight on this fine motion on the sexualisation of girls in the media. I have enjoyed being able to hear what the previous speakers have said, to make sure that I do not go over the same ground. As a father of two girls, aged 11 and seven, these are exactly the sorts of things that concern me. I am sure that I am like all parents, particularly all fathers, out there across country. You have to be on your guard the whole time. No matter where you go, there is the potential to encounter the sexualisation, the rapid onset of adult themes, that face young people, our children. You only need to be sitting in the car listening to commercial radio and you hear some of those abhorrent ads from Advanced Medical Institute, or whoever they are, about nasal delivery systems. It seems that you can hear those ads on the radio at whatever time of day you might happen to have your children in the car with you. We must always be on our guard against those things.

Fortunately, in the area where I usually have my kids in the car with me, we do not have the sorts of billboards that seem to be so prevalent in the major cities over here on the east coast. Some of the things that are up on those billboards I do not want to have to explain to them. I do not want my 11-year-old or, worse, my seven-year-old saying to me, ‘What does that mean?’ I do not want them to be asking those sorts of questions. We must be on guard against these sorts of images, these sorts of ideas. Also, particularly as legislators, we should give careful consideration to what is authorised.

Another problem area is Facebook. I have recently become aware that there are some very young children with Facebook profiles. Let us face it, there is quite a deal of adult conversation on social networking sites. As a parent, I regularly look over the shoulders of my kids when they are on the internet—when I am in town. They do not have a Facebook profile. I am very glad that they are more into horsey websites and things like that—pretty positive stuff or, at least, not harmful stuff. But it is important to keep an eye on that. It is also important to look at
filters. Parents should invest in filters to make sure that, while they are not looking over their children’s shoulders, safety for their children is still available.

Some TV shows are also worth considering, particularly those after 7.30 or eight o’clock at night, such as Two and a Half Men. Really, these are not shows for children at all. We should not be letting our 10- and 11-year-olds look at this stuff. They do not even understand what the concepts are. I was at school one day last year for my daughter’s year 1 class, and one of the boys made a comment that I thought was somewhat offensive and obscene. I will not mention the boy’s name, but I said to him, ‘Do you want me to tell your mother that you said that?’ and he backed off immediately. He did not appear to know what he had actually said. Later, I heard from a sibling that they had been watching Two and a Half Men the night before. It just shows that being on guard is always required.

I would also like to mention another bane of my existence, and that is swearing. I am one of those people who think that if you want to swear in front of your kids, if you want to use the ‘F’ word or worse in front of your children, then you can expect nothing else but that they will use that language in the future. I think a lot of people inflict problems on their children by not showing a bit of self-control in that regard. The dangers are all around, and parents should stand up to the mark. At the same time, we should look at some of the things that we allow to be out there in front of them. I thank the member for Kingston for bringing this motion forward.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (9.24 pm)—I think this is a very worthy motion, and it is something I have pursued in previous parliaments. I congratulate the member for Kingston for looking at this vital area. As a mother of a 10-year-old child, I, like many speakers before me, deal with this on an ongoing basis. My daughter is, of course, gorgeous, as all our children are, and I am terrified for her on a daily basis. My husband says we are going to homeschool her from the age of about 12. But this cannot be done. I cannot wrap her in cotton wool and I cannot protect her from everything in life. We as a government cannot wrap the nation’s children in cotton wool, but we do need to do things to ensure that our children get a childhood and that they do not get bombarded with images that lead to negative thoughts that can lead to dangerous areas like eating disorders. Eating disorders is an area I have pursued in this parliament, and I want to commend the government for taking action on it. I will get to that in a minute.

My 10-year-old child was given a dreaded Bratz doll. She burst into tears because she thought her father would take it off her because he had previously told her that Barbie was ‘Satan’. This was pretty bad, as she attended the Syndal Baptist childcare centre and had said she could not have Barbie because my husband was of the view that it was such a negative image that we should not have it. Lo and behold, her birthday party arrived, and there is the dreaded Bratz doll, with the unbelievably large lips. Anyway, we took the Bratz doll and we have lived with the Bratz doll. We have lived with Total Girl, a magazine aimed at small children, which has pin-up posters of boys and things and also cute kittens and giveaways to attract 10-year-olds to pick it up in the store. We have had the dreaded High School Musical 1, 2 and 3. I recommend them to all of you highly—not! Again, it is bombardment with images of what my child should perceive herself to be. I want my child to be herself. That is a really dreadful thing to ask of any child, and it is a very hard lesson to learn, but we have to
teach her resilience so she can get there. We had the dreaded experience of going into a store to buy her an outfit, and a woman saying she looks so grown up. I do not want her to look grown up. I want her to look 10! That is all I require. I want her to have a childhood. I do not want to mollycoddle her, I do not want her to not be a feminist, but I believe that she, like all our children, deserves to enjoy this precious time and not have the mass media somehow consume and take it away from her.

In the previous parliament, I called on the former government to take seriously the issue of body image and eating disorders. A lot of the research demonstrates that this sexualisation, this constant bombardment with what you are meant to look like, does have serious negative consequences for many young women and, increasingly, young boys. The AMA, in its most recent report, states:

Eating disorders are serious psychiatric illnesses. The prevalence of eating disorders among children and adolescents is rising. While it is difficult to assess exactly how common eating disorders are (as many cases may go undiagnosed) it is estimated that one in 100 adolescent girls develop anorexia nervosa, and that it is the third most common chronic illness in girls, after obesity and asthma. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) state that eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness, with a death rate higher than that of major depression.

And we treat this illness with contempt. We do not take it seriously, we do not fund its research and we do not treat it as an illness, which it is. I commend the Rudd Labor government for finally realising that we need to do something about it. Last year the Minister for Health and Ageing announced funding of $3.5 million over four years to tackle the growing epidemic of eating disorders, including $500,000 for the Butterfly Foundation to establish a national eating disorders collaboration. I have dealt with the Butterfly Foundation for many years, and I again want to congratulate Claire Vickery, the CEO and founder of the foundation, who has been committed to raising the issue of eating disorders and how people end up in this terrible spiral. Nothing had been done for many years, and now we are doing more.

In addition, the federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth has tackled this issue, appointing a national advisory group on body image. She received their first report in October 2009. The report notably called for the development of a voluntary code for body image. A lot of this needs to be done on a voluntary basis. There is a lot of angst in the debate. Clive Hamilton, who in 2006 put out a report entitled Corporate paedophilia, raised the issue, and more needs to be done.

The SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Mobile Phone Services

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (9.30 pm)—Widgee is a community of fewer than 700 people located 24 kilometres west of Gympie in my electorate. Widgee does not have mobile phone coverage and, in spite of its relatively small population, a petition calling on the Australian government to install mobile phone coverage for the Widgee community has attracted 1,181 signatures. The Petitions Committee has determined that this petition does not meet the technical requirements, so I seek leave to table it as a document.

Leave granted.
Mr TRUSS—I thank the House. Part of the reason why the petition attracted so many signatures is Widgee’s popularity because of local events, including the Widgee Bushman’s Carnival in May, the Widgee Pony Club Annual Gymkhana and Campdraft in June, the endurance trail ride in July and the Bush Balladeers festival on the last weekend in October.

The Widgee community has identified three possible sites for a mobile phone tower, including the Amamoor State Forest, where a temporary mobile phone tower is located every year for the Gympie Music Muster; a local landowner has offered land where emergency services towers are already erected; and the old forestry tower might be an option, located in the state forest.

Telecommunications companies should recognise that they have a social obligation to extend services and to roll out telecommunications services even in less economic regional communities. But the government should also have a role. The former coalition government understood that telecommunications companies could not always be relied upon to improve mobile phone coverage and access to broadband in regional areas. That is why, when in government, the coalition created the original mobile phone black spots program, which improved mobile phone coverage in communities where it was not commercially viable for telecommunication companies to make those investments. Regular reviews of the adequacy of the network, such as the Estens review and the Glasson review, identified gaps that needed to be filled. Approximately $175 million was provided by the previous government to extend mobile phone coverage through this program, delivering mobile phone coverage to upwards of 230 regional and rural communities and along stretches of at least 34 highways.

Regrettably, the new federal government has not funded the Glasson review’s recommendations, which could have helped little communities like Widgee obtain that mobile phone coverage that they need. The former government also established a $2 billion Communications Fund that was to be invested and the earnings used to improve a range of communications services in rural and remote communities. Regrettably, the federal government has taken this money for its NBN program, which now will not be extended to regions with small populations like Widgee.

The government has a responsibility to ensure that people living in regional communities have access to fast, reliable communications services. Instead of spending more than $43 billion on broadband in the capital cities, taxpayer funded improvements across a whole range of communications services should target communities where it is not commercially viable for these services to be provided by the private sector. Accordingly, I appeal to the government to help Widgee in its quest for mobile phone coverage.

I thank the Widgee community for organising this petition and all those who put the effort into collecting the signatures. They have been campaigning for mobile phone coverage for a number of years. I have raised their plight with Telstra and other telecommunications companies, and there have been times when I thought they were on the list and that one day soon they might get the mobile phone coverage that they want so much. The loss of the black spots funding was a critical blow. Communities like this one are never going to be likely to be commercially viable as far as the communications companies are concerned, so there will need to be some support to enable them to receive mobile phone coverage. I call on the government to acknowledge this petition and to work with me and the Widgee community...
to establish permanent mobile phone coverage for the Widgee region.

**Victorian Bushfires**

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.35 pm)—It was just one year ago that I joined with my colleagues from all sides of the parliament in supporting a condolence motion in relation to the devastating Black Saturday bushfires. These fires will be eternally etched in our nation’s history, given that this was Australia’s worst natural disaster. It claimed a staggering 173 lives, destroyed more than 2,000 houses, left thousands homeless and crushed whole towns and communities.

On this first anniversary of this tragedy that shook a nation, I would like to place on record my thoughts and prayers for the victims of the Victorian bushfires, for their friends and families, and for their loss of life or their loss of loved ones. This is something that should always stay with us. They should know that they are not forgotten, and certainly their spirit is admirable. I am proud to be a member of this government, which has committed to doing whatever is possible to help rebuild lives and communities and doing so in a bipartisan matter. In particular, I would like to congratulate Parliamentary Secretary Bill Shorten for his hard work and dedication to these devastated communities. I also praise the efforts of my parliamentary colleagues, in particular the member for McEwen, who has been working very closely with the community in this difficult rebuilding phase.

During my speech last year I touched on my gratitude for all those people who contributed in many ways in situations that most of us will not experience or understand ourselves. I spoke about those who provide counselling services and financial services, and the many volunteers who gave so willingly of their time. I also take this opportunity to praise our wonderful emergency services personnel, including our ambos, firefighters and police who held all those in need. They were, at this time last year, fighting to contain the remaining fires, sifting through the rubble of houses looking for bodies, providing medical assistance for those who were injured, hunting down arsonists and undertaking the very grim task of formally identifying those who tragically perished.

I want to say to them that their tireless contributions are deeply valued by our community at large. I know, through my close association with police across this nation, that after being through devastating events such as the bushfires people just do not switch off. This stuff actually stays with you. The unprecedented nature of these fires, in particular, has meant that the welfare of many of the police in Victoria has required close monitoring. I have spoken several times about the difficult and dangerous nature of the role that police play in our community and the need to support our police, and once again I say that it is essential that we continue to protect those who unselfishly give of their time and efforts to protect our communities.

Let us not forget that the Victorian police, like many of the victims, are still reminded of the tragedy on a daily basis. Police are continuing to investigate the deliberately lit Black Saturday bushfires. I understand from reports in yesterday’s Age that the Victorian police have so far put in about 106,300 hours of investigative work into the bushfires. The task force investigators have already taken 4,000 statements from witnesses and are expected to take a further 500 to 1,000 statements over the coming 12 months.

Police have already, as we know, arrested two suspects in relation to two of the three bushfires that they believed were deliberately lit, and are chasing several leads into others,
and they are confident that those responsible will be brought to justice. No matter how long it takes to bring the people responsible to justice, I know that the commitment and the ongoing work of the Victorian police is deeply appreciated by the community and by the nation and that they will stay in our thoughts for the efforts that they have undertaken on behalf of our community at large.

**Green Loans Program**

**Mr LAMING** (Bowman) (9.39 pm)—Children around the land for the last decade have been taught that the great future in jobs is green jobs. We have seen Prime Minister Howard’s Green Corps; we have seen Tony Abbott’s Green Army. But the true disgrace, where we have seen green to the obscene, has been the Rudd government and its triumvirate of ham-fisted failures in attempting to create jobs in the green sector. We all know very well how they managed to collapse the entire solar rebate scheme; that is history and I do not need to go over it. Number two, we remember how they then quintupled, not doubled or trebled, the renewable energy certificates on home solar rebates, and that caused a complete collapse in the price of RECS and a loss of confidence in the system. Then of course there was the now famous home insulation program where the government plucked $1,600 out of the air and basically farmed three-point-something billion dollars into allowing, in many cases, anyone who could get hold of a ute and a couple of mates to drive out and solicit the opportunity to get into the insides of houses and put in home insulation. What have we seen? We have seen house fires, poorly trained installers and the tragedy of four electrocutions—one of those reported today, quite tragically—because of a lack of training. We also have the anecdotes of people pushing insulation up through the manhole and then lifting a couple of roof tiles and pushing it back out again into the truck, driving off and collecting the $1,600. This is a program that is a disgrace for any government that runs it.

You might have thought it could not get any worse but, alas, it has. We have the home sustainability assessment scheme, HSAS. It will reverberate in your ears, members on the other side, for the next few weeks, because you have pushed not hundreds but thousands of young Australians—small business people, part-time employed people—basically over the edge because of a program that was promised to run through to 2013 and is about to collapse in the weeks ahead. Now, there is another thing that you learn at school: it is never good to get into a sector where the government controls both the supply and demand, let alone the accreditation. But they will soon be learning that it is not ever a smart thing to take a job in any opportunity run by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, and his department, because what we have is not the promise—from Senate estimates in 2008—of just 1,000 to 2,000 assessors being trained, but some bright spark in that department deciding it might be a good idea to completely deregulate training altogether. We have seen stories filtering in from around the country of training organisations shoehorning hundreds of people into auditoriums, of four-day courses becoming just a DVD in the mail and now not 1,000, 2,000 or 5,000, but 10,000 assessors paying up to $3,000, and in some cases $7,000, for training, accreditation and insurance—insurance for which no claims have ever been made. We have 200,000 houses assessed. With an additional 22,000 everyday, this scheme will collapse unless this government does something in the next month.

These people have put their lives on the line. They expected some certainty through to 2013. They were promised an income by training organisations of $5,000 a week, incomes that will never, ever occur. Far from
listening to the warnings in August, what we now have is the reality made clear in an ABSA email sent to Minister Garrett’s department on 25 August. It begins:

We are fielding a very large number of calls and emails from growing numbers of increasingly disgruntled assessors.

It goes on to say that they are recommending, as they have a responsibility to their assessors, that the numbers are capped from 30 September and that that advice must go out on 1 September to prevent overloading of both ABSA and the DEWHA systems and to protect the work of the assessors currently trained. What happened? Nothing. Not until January did they finally wake up in that department. That is a very long Christmas holiday.

We have heard of pyramid schemes before where those who get in first get something out of it and the late entrants get nothing, but what we had from this government was a GFC induced panic to try and push as many people into work as they could regardless of any obligations made in promises made in 2008 to train between 1,000 and 2,000 assessors only. What we now have is the appalling collapse of the fourth scheme under this minister and we are looking at $15 million being paid by assessors, many of whom will never recoup those costs. It is a disgrace.

What do we have in emails from 22 and 29 January from ABSA to its frustrated members who cannot get membership? They say they are ‘now holding over 5,000 new applications awaiting processing’ and that it is counterproductive to take any further fees nor accept applications. So there is no guarantee of any assurance of any particular volume of work. But in the end all of your money will ensure you remain a member of ABSA and that you will ‘receive ongoing communications’ by email from us of further government programs. That is all that your government can offer these Australians, many of whom came home from the GFC looking for a secure occupation and got nothing but the disappointment of a Rudd generated pyramid scheme.

You expect more from a government. Running through a crisis and controlling the economy is not easy, but running a home sustainability assessment scheme should be.

(Climate Change)

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (9.44 pm)—Mr Speaker, I am sure that you, like me and a lot of other members of this House, received a lot of emails starting last year about Lord Monckton and his views on climate change. I am speaking here tonight to draw attention to an excellent article by Mike Carlton in Saturday’s Sydney Morning Herald. I must say, when I first got an email suggesting that at Copenhagen the first draft of the agreement was one that would impose world government on all signatory countries, I was a little alarmed. So I made some inquiries. Was this so? Did the first draft of the Copenhagen agreement contain, as Lord Monckton had suggested, this draft? Of course it did not. At Copenhagen there were lots of submissions—from, I think, about 160 countries—and in fact there was no draft, and no such proposal. Copenhagen has been and gone, and we still do not have world government and nor will we.

Lord Monckton claims to be a mathematician. As the article points out, that is: Baloney. He has a Cambridge degree in Classics, ie Latin and Ancient Greek, and a diploma in journalism … from Cardiff.

So he is no expert on mathematics, as he suggests in his interviews. He also claims that he was a ‘science adviser’ to Margaret Thatcher. As the article points out, this is incorrect:
Thatcher has a science degree herself; she hardly needed—it says, and I agree—a science adviser who didn’t.

Lord Monckton was hired in 1982 as a low-level policy adviser in her policy unit, working on public housing and the like—nothing to do with the environment; nothing to do with climate change.

Lord Monckton claims that he is a member of the House of Lords. He is a lord; he is a hereditary lord. There has been a change in the UK and hereditary peers no longer automatically have the right to sit in the House of Lords. At a by-election that he contested for the Lords in 2007, he got not one vote—not one vote!

Lord Monckton also claims that he has received a Nobel Prize—that he is a Nobel Prize winner. This is on the website of his grandly titled Science and Public Policy Institute, which states:

His contribution to the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 … earned him the status of Nobel Peace Laureate.

It states he has received a:

… Nobel Prize pin, made of gold recovered from a physics experiment …

This, of course, is utterly false. Al Gore and the committee received the prize. Lord Monckton does not have a pin. There is no such honour as a Nobel Prize pin. So I guess the point I am making is that this guy has tremendous form in making claims about his own background. I noticed that Andrew Bolt on *Insiders* said, ‘But Al Gore has made mistakes.’ Well, Al Gore has not falsely claimed to have received a Nobel prize. He has not falsely claimed that he was Vice President of America. He has not falsely claimed that he ran for the presidency. There seems to me to be a world of difference between that and lying about your background and then seeking credibility.

What disappoints me, I suppose, is that so many people have actually put their faith in what he has to say as being gospel. It is true that Barnaby Joyce has come under some criticism in his role as shadow finance minister, but he had this to say about Lord Monckton:

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 …

Regrettably, last Wednesday night, the Leader of the Opposition did not take a step back; he took a step forward. He met with Lord Monckton. And what a fraud Lord Monckton is.

Mission Australia’s 34th Christmas Lunch in the Park

Mr IRONS (Swan) (9.49 pm)—On a brighter note: Christmas lunch in 2009 was an experience for me and many others in Perth that I will raise today and I will never forget. In our second week back in parliament, I hope that all our colleagues are refreshed from the summer recess and also with our families. There are three major days on our calendar—Christmas Day, New Year’s Day and, of course, Australia Day. I spent my Christmas Day in Wellington Square in East Perth. It was pulsing with over 1,200 guests attending this Mission Australia event.

Mission Australia’s annual Christmas Lunch in the Park, also known as CLIP, is held on Christmas Day and brings some Christmas cheer to Perth locals seeking a place to celebrate the festive season. As we all know, in the fun and excitement of Christmas it is very easy to forget the true meaning of the season. This lunch is held for Western Australians who are less fortunate—
homeless, isolated or lonely. Christmas can be a day of uncertainty and struggle. Mission Australia’s annual Christmas Lunch in the Park ensures a Christmas Day full of fun, food and friendship for 1,500 Perth locals, including volunteers. On Christmas Day, Mission Australia, along with the help of over 400 volunteers, delivered their 34th annual Christmas Lunch in the Park, and each guest received a traditional Christmas lunch, a gift from Santa, entertainment and great company.

Despite temperatures of up to 35 degrees, guests had a fantastic time, thanks to the generous efforts of those 400 men and women who volunteered their time on the day and in the months leading up to the big event. I was fortunate enough to be given the privilege of hosting the lunch and, along with Perth sports presenter Adrian Barich, we launched the lunch and event with gusto. Adrian, as a former West Coast Eagle, got the crowd going with some good old home town football rivalry by asking the crowd to declare their support for the Eagles or the Dockers. On balance I would say the Eagles just won.

There was plenty of entertainment on the day provided by the Perth Christian Choir and Perth opera singing duo Katherine and Justin Freind. Their singing and range of songs were just an added bonus for the day and they sang many songs that we all knew and could sing along with. They finished the day off with a version of Time to say Goodbye, which bought a tear to many an eye.

Perth has been booming, with new people settling from interstate and overseas, many of whom do not have established networks or family to celebrate Christmas Day with. One young family attended the lunch for the first time, as they had no extended family in Australia after moving here from the UK. In the true spirit of the day, the family found their friendly table hosts were also from the UK and made plans to catch up again.

CLIP is now one of Perth’s major annual community events and a true demonstration of social inclusion. Guests ranged from single people to couples and families, some who had recently arrived in the country, and others who may have been lonely, struggling financially or homeless.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all the staff and organisers of the day from Mission Australia. It is a massive project to organise and the event ran like a well oiled machine. The 400 men and women who volunteered their time on the day as table hosts must also be applauded. The people of Perth are very generous when it comes to this event and there is never any doubt the 400 host and volunteer positions will be filled. The cut-off date for the volunteer positions is usually in October, so eager and generous are the people of Perth.

At the end of the day I rose to close the event and I quoted a line from the movie The Bucket List that was asked of Jack Nicholson’s character. It was: ‘Have you bought joy to anyone’s life today?’ I then told the organisers and volunteers that they had indeed done that on this Perth Christmas Day Lunch in the Park. Mission Australia, I applaud you for your efforts and commitment to the people and families of Perth. This ongoing event is a great example of our community working together with a commitment to those who are more in need than others in our society.

Modbury Hospital

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (9.53 pm)—On 20 March there will be a state election in South Australia, and once again Modbury Hospital is being used as a political football by the Liberal Party in South Australia. Yesterday, in an article in the Sunday Mail, the member for Sturt entered the state election fray with some political posturing in respect to the
Modbury Hospital. It comes as no surprise that truth is often a casualty when you listen to the member for Sturt. That was very much the case as he tried to make the Modbury Hospital a state election issue on behalf of his state colleagues.

The Modbury Public Hospital was built by the Dunstan Labor government and opened in 1973. It lies within the seat of Makin. It is a good hospital that serves Adelaide’s north-eastern community well. As with any hospital, things can go wrong from time to time. But the serious concerns with the hospital occurred under the watch of Liberal governments, both state and federal. Firstly, it was a Liberal government in 1995 that privatised Modbury Hospital by handing over the management of it to the private organisation Healthscope. It was under that privatisation that the hospital’s service and reputation rapidly deteriorated, so much so that by the 2002 state election the local community was demanding that the state government take back administration of the hospital. So too was Healthscope, which by that time was only too willing to hand it back to the state government. In 2002 the state Labor government was returned to office and the hospital reverted to public management on 1 July 2007, when the agreement with Healthscope expired.

Because of the Liberals’ privatisation, Modbury Hospital was returned to public hands in a very stressed and rundown state. Labor set about restoring the hospital’s reputation. But then along came the federal Liberals, and what did they do? They cut hospital funding by $1 billion. Who was parliamentary secretary for health between 2004 and 2007? It was none other than the member for Sturt. So we have a state Liberal government that washes its hands of the hospital and privatises it and, then, when the Labor government takes it back the federal Liberals cut national funding to hospitals by $1 billion.

Since coming to office, the state Labor government has in fact worked methodically on reforming the whole of health system in South Australia. Using additional funding provided by the Rudd government, health services in the north-east are being restored. Since being elected in 2002, the Rann government has spent an additional $39 million on Modbury Hospital. That is an increase of 73 per cent. Since 2007, the Rann government has employed an extra 39 doctors and 42 nurses at Modbury Hospital. The Rann Labor government has also committed $12 million to infrastructure upgrades at the hospital. An additional $2.5 million has been spent on renovating the outpatient clinic areas, radiology and lift foyers.

South Australia’s Health Care Plan 2007-16 identified Modbury Hospital as both a high-volume elective surgery site and a hospital that would tailor its services to meet the needs of the ageing population in the north-eastern suburbs by expanding in the areas of rehabilitation, aged care and palliative care. Modbury Hospital, while still undergoing some adjustments, is once again rebuilding its credibility and reputation. Furthermore, the hospital will be supported and complemented by a $25 million GP superclinic being built almost adjacent to it. The $25 million clinic is being jointly funded by the federal and state governments, and I am working closely with the local state members, Frances Bedford, Jennifer Rankine, Tom Kenyon and Jack Snelling, to ensure that the people of the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide have access to the best possible health services. I say ‘best possible’ because we all know that we could always provide better services if there were unlimited money available or more doctors and nurses in the system. Again, it was the Howard government that limited entry places into university
for doctors, and now we are playing catch up.

The fact is that people in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide know that it was the state Labor government that built the public Modbury Hospital and a state Liberal government that privatised it. It was the Rann Labor government that restored the hospital into public hands. They know that the Howard government cut hospital funding to the states by $1 billion, and it was the Rudd government that restored that funding. They also know it was a federal Labor government that increased funding for elective surgery and training of more doctors and nurses. And it is the state and federal Labor governments, working together, that will be making a $25 million commitment to health services in the north-east with the development of GP superclinic at Modbury. These are real commitments, not political spin or political rhetoric.

When it comes to the Modbury Hospital, the Liberal Party has no credibility and a lot to answer for. Voters will judge them accordingly on this issue at the coming state election.

**Adelaide Sporting Events**

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (9.58 pm)—I would like to speak about two recent sporting events in Adelaide that I have been pleased to attend. Firstly, there was the Brighton Jetty Classic open water swim. I was pleased to attend that yesterday with my family. This has been held by the Brighton Surf Life Saving Club since 2006. It involves an open water swim of either 400 metres or 1,500 metres. It now attracts hundreds of participants. It has become a very important event in the swimming calendar in South Australia. Some of the people swimming include a Los Angeles Olympian, Glenn Ber-ingen and Dwayne Thuys. Associated with this jetty classic there is also a sculpture event and a rowing race between the Crows and the Power.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 10.00 pm, the debate is interrupted.

**House adjourned at 10.00 pm**
The DEPUTY SPEAKER took the chair at 4 pm.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Green Loans Program

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (4.00 pm)—I take this short opportunity today to bring to the attention of the House contact with some of my constituents in relation to the Green Loans Program. I quote from a letter from Warren Lane:

Dear Mr Ramsey, I was recently contacted by your office in regards to passing on my contact details to some of your constituents for the purpose of Home Sustainability Assessments for the Australian Government Green Loans program. As an accredited assessor for this program, I wish to bring to your attention the poor management and potentially fraudulent behaviour by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts … I (and all the other independent assessors) have found the assessment booking system very difficult to deal with. It is basically a bit of a lottery when calling the programs hotline. I find it necessary to call at 9-00am (EST)—that is, Eastern Standard Time—otherwise the call is automatically disconnected for the remainder of the day. Sometimes it is impossible to get through at all on any particular day. There appears to be an alternative process in place for Fieldforce, a company employing a large number of assessors with the ability to input their assessments directly to the system without needing to contact the call centre. This is an unfair arrangement. The program was launched with the expectation to end in December 2012 but it has become obvious that it will probably end in the next few months. An original estimate of approximately 1,000 assessors Australia wide has blown out to more than 5,000 with possibly another 5,000 still waiting for their government contracts.

And it goes on. I might mention some other constituents who have contacted me, in particular those who live in the country, who are finding it impossible to access these loans. I read from an email to Mr Rudd:

Good morning Mr Rudd, I registered with the green loan assessment office in November 2009, confirmation received 30th November with all the correct details recorded. I wish to avail myself of the government program to receive from Satisfac Credit Union a 10,000 4 year interest free loan to finance solar panels on my home. It appears that, because I live in Port Lincoln, the country, there is no one to assess my residence, so because I live in the country, I cannot access the program. If I lived in Canberra, Sydney or Adelaide, it has been inferred by the people at the Green Loan assessment office, it would be about a 7 day wait.

I received another email from a constituent who applied for rainwater tanks, who lives in Crystal Brook. They said:

We contacted the Green Loans Assessment centre on 10 November 2009, lodged an enquiry and told there were currently no Assessors in our area. The operator informed us we should have someone to visit us by the end of the month (end of November), even if it was to be himself.

Having received no contact, we again telephoned the centre on 7 December 2009 and were informed there were still no assessors in our area. I had previously understood this to mean there were no assessors in the area available to visit …

And further: ‘The operator’s explanation confirmed that none existed in our area’ et cetera. I would point out, while I am speaking on the inefficiency of this scheme, that a staff member
tried for two days to get through on the hotline and was unable on any occasion—(Time expired)

Flynn Electorate: Mr Edgar Thomas Towner

Mr TREVOR (Flynn) (4.03 pm)—The electorate of Flynn is one of the most diverse electorates in Australia. I am proud to be its first ever federal member and proud to represent it and its people. The electorate covers some 314,000 square kilometres. By way of comparison, both Victoria and Tasmania could sit within its electoral boundaries. Most of my travelling within the electorate is undertaken by four-wheel-drive. I get to meet some wonderful people during my travels and, during my last visit with Minister Elliot to Blackall, one of my western communities, I had the honour to meet Ronan Robinson, a Blackall school student and his mum, Gillian. I presented Ronan with an Australian flag. Ronan is a very special young man. As part of a school project he wrote about World War I soldier Edgar Thomas Towner, a Blackall war hero. Following the publishing of his article the Blackall community, famous for its fundraising efforts, raised $80,000 for a statue of the war hero Towner. The statue is situated in Memorial Park, Blackall. I visited the statue. It is a great tribute to war hero Edgar Thomas Towner and his relatives and a credit to the Blackall community and, in particular, the outstanding efforts of Ronan. I thank Ronan for his outstanding efforts in recognising Blackall’s bravest son. Edgar Thomas Towner was awarded a Victoria Cross and Military Cross for his bravery in World War I. He remains the most decorated Queensland-born soldier and is now immortalised for his fine efforts and bravery in serving his country.

Blackall will not be part of the Flynn community after the next election. I wish the Robinson family well in their future endeavours, and I thank the people of Blackall for their hospitality over the last two years. I may, hopefully, get to visit them again before the next election. Time will tell. I have a feeling that Ronan will go on to do great things in his life, and I wish him well for the future.

Flynder Electorate: Baxter

Green Loans Program

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.05 pm)—I wish to raise two matters of concern to my constituents. The first is in relation to a plan to cut the town of Baxter in half, and the second is an issue that has been raised in this House today: the difficulties facing Green Loans assessors throughout the country.

The first matter is that the town of Baxter will see the Peninsula Link freeway pass through it. I accept the need for the freeway; I believe that it is an important and valuable project. However, as this new freeway passes through the town of Baxter, instead of having an underpass in the land that is available, which is perfectly suited to the task—there is a wide culvert which has been set aside—there will be an overpass right through the heart of this beautiful town. It is a town where people come because it has a rural quality. It is outside the edge of Melbourne. It is the gateway to the Mornington Peninsula. It is the gateway to a rural lifestyle. People go there for peace and quiet, and what we are about to see from the state government is a plan to cut Baxter in half.

This is not just a social policy issue which can be remedied with the stroke of a pen. Once this overpass is built, it will be there for a hundred years—there is no question about that—and the quality of life for all people in Baxter will be severely diminished. So this is the mo-
ment, the time and the place where we must work with the people of Baxter to fight to ensure that their town is not riven in two. So the message to the state and to the contractors is that there is an alternative—it is a feasible alternative; it was put on the table by the state—and that is that there must be a cutaway underpass for the Peninsula Link freeway through Baxter rather than an overpass. That is the only acceptable outcome.

The second issue which I wish to raise relates to a concern brought to me by Joe Barbieri of Somerville and many others in my electorate and electorates around the country. The Green Loans Program was meant to do two things. It was meant to allow households to achieve sustainability through receiving low-interest loans. It was also meant to provide employment for assessors. What we have seen instead is dodgy trainers training up assessors when the trainers have not had the proper qualifications. We have seen a massive oversupply of assessors, who are unable to obtain work.

We on the opposition side have been contacted by literally hundreds and hundreds of assessors who have spent up to $3,000. They are out of pocket. They are out of work. Many were axed last Friday. It is time for the government to have an immediate Auditor-General’s inquiry and to fix another broken environmental program. *(Time expired)*

**Blair Electorate: St Brigid’s Church**

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.08 pm)—St Brigid’s Catholic Church in Rosewood in the electorate of Blair is one of Ipswich’s icons. It is a much-visited tourist attraction and on the heritage trail. For over 100 years now, the church building known as St Brigid’s Catholic Church has been the epicentre of the Catholic faith, a community of faith in the rural areas of Ipswich tending to the welfare, spirituality and educational needs of the people of Rosewood in the rural communities surrounding the township in the city of Ipswich. Many masses, baptisms and burials have been conducted, and the church community has tended to the needs of the sick, the poor and the vulnerable. Members of the community are involved in the Lions group, Cabanda Aged Care and many other service organisations, including the Rosewood Roosters football team.

My wife, Carolyn, and I had the pleasure of attending the centenary celebration of St Brigid’s Catholic Church and the blessing of the altar and lectern on 7 February this year. The presider was the Most Reverend John Bathersby, the Archbishop of Brisbane. A number of other members of the clergy were there, including the Very Reverend Peter Casey, the Dean of South Country Deanery, who is also the priest at St Mary’s Catholic Church in Ipswich—another beautiful Catholic church building that is well recognised in the City of Ipswich. The parish administrator is Reverend John Conway. Father John is a local Ipswich identity. He was born in Ipswich on 3 October 1956 and is an old boy of St Edmund’s College. He was ordained in 1990. He and many members of the Catholic community are working hard to restore the building. This building is significant because it is probably the largest timber church in the Southern Hemisphere, being 62 feet wide and 90 feet long. It is a very large and beautiful church building. The foundations were blessed on 13 December 1908 by Father Andrew Horan in Ipswich.

Attached to the church is St Brigid’s Catholic Primary School, which is well led by the principal, Veronica Lawson. The church partners with the people and the parents of Rosewood to provide the best education possible for the young people there. St Brigid’s Catholic Primary School is receiving $75,000 as part of the National School Pride Program funding and the
BER funding, and $850,000 for a multipurpose hall under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program. I am very pleased that I will be turning the first sod in the next few weeks with Veronica Lawson. Congratulations to the Catholic community of Rosewood and to St Brigid’s Catholic Church. May you go on in the decades to come.

**Swan Electorate: Australia Day**

Mr IRONS (Swan) (4.11 pm)—Nearly two weeks ago, we celebrated Australia Day in my electorate. Australia Day is an important day for my constituents. Many of them turn out to local council events to celebrate the day and to celebrate the swearing-in of our new citizens. Celebrations and citizenship ceremonies were held across my electorate by the City of Cannning, the City of South Perth and the Town of Victoria Park. One of the best aspects of the City of South Perth’s ceremony is that it takes place on the Swan River foreshore, a very public part of Perth, where the community can be involved. In fact, during the ceremony many people out for their morning exercise stopped to take part in the event.

Gerry Ganning performed the MC duties, as usual, and there was an impressive array of distinguished guests, including His Excellency Dr Ken Michael, the Governor of Western Australia, and his wife, and the Hon. Simon O’Brien, the WA Minister for Transport. Local South Perth MLA John McGrath, Senator Alan Eggleston and MLC Nick Goiran were also in attendance.

The most important people on the day were the new Australian citizens, who took either the oath or the affirmation of allegiance. Several local personalities were nominated for the South Perth Citizen of the Year award for their contribution to the local scene, including Barry Allen for his work with the Manning Memorial Bowling Club and Manning Senior Citizens Centre; Jack Davies for his work with the Manning RSL; Lorna Dodd for her role with the Lions Help to Hear Foundation; Richard Moore for his work with the Rotary Club of Como and the South Perth Church of Christ; Roy Mouritzen for his involvement with the South Perth RSL and Concorde Nursing Home; Harold Munday of Manning RSL and Bowling Club; Roslyn Pavy of Save the Children, South of River Branch; and Albert Pollard for his involvement with the 1st Salter Point Scout Group. Congratulations must go to 85-year-old Lorna Dodd, who was a deserving winner of the overall award. Well done also to Jeremy Gillbanks, who won the Young South Perth Citizen of the Year award for his work in rehabilitating native bushland.

The Town of Victoria Park ceremony happened later in the morning and was hosted by the mayor, Trevor Vaughan. There was an impressive brass band with some good entertainment from local songwriter Bernard Carney and the Spirit of the Streets Choir. Bernard sings a song about the quokkas from Rottnest. Fortunately, I was at the back and did not have to dance with the rest of the dignitaries down the front. Congratulations to all our new citizens, including Mr Peter Betz, Miss Simrat Kaur, Mr Aminur Rahman, Mr Junku Kin, Daniel Milner, Parveen Kumar Ponniah, Tanya Moyle, Wing Lee and Barbara Watson. I would also like to congratulate Mrs Jean Kelly, who I mentioned last week in a speech. Jean won a Town of Victoria Park Community Award.

At the City of Canning ceremony, Russell Gorton was awarded the City of Canning Local Citizen of the Year award for his work in the Canning River Wetlands. Russell is an outstanding individual who balances running his small businesses with being president of the Wilson Wetlands Action Group and taking part in environmental action. Russell and I have

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**MAIN COMMITTEE**
been working closely together on a number of local issues and he came to my office on Friday with the River Guardians to help celebrate World Wetlands Day.

**Lowe Electorate: Australia Day**

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (4.14 pm)—On Australia Day this year I had the pleasure of attending several Australia Day ceremonies in my electorate of Lowe hosted by the local councils. Sydney turned on a beautiful sunny day to welcome hundreds of new Australian citizens as they took the pledge. Surrounded by family and friends, the spirit of community was reflected in the large crowds that gathered in the local parks. On Australia Day we welcome new citizens and recognise citizens who give back to our community through their extraordinary talents, volunteer efforts and participation in local life.

Canada Bay Council recognised the outstanding community contribution of Citizen of the Year 2010, Mr Warwick Williams, for his tireless service to Rotary and the Inner West Red Shield Appeal. Mr Williams has been the chairman of the appeal for 25 years and is a proud sponsor of local charity, Communities for Communities, which recently reached its $1 million fundraising target this year.

Mr Vishaal Sharma from Abbotsford was awarded the Young Citizen of the Year award for his efforts in founding the UNSW Education without Borders as well as for his involvement with the Canada Bay Youth Committee and the local Amnesty International Urgent Action Network.

Sports Citizen of the Year went to Carla Blancato for her dedication and involvement in the local soccer club. Carla played in the women’s state league competition and captained her team to victory in 2009. Mr Terry Robinson was awarded the Arts and Culture Citizen of the Year for his voluntary work as a graphic artist for many years for the Concord Heritage Society. In this area Mr Robinson designed and constructed displays for the City of Canada Bay museum. Mr Robinson is also very well known for his efforts at the local Rotary, often donating his artwork to assist fundraising efforts.

Strathfield Council recognised the efforts of Mr Ray Wilson, naming him Strathfield Citizen of the Year. Mr Wilson, who has supported Stretford Rotary for over 20 years, is a committed fundraising volunteer for multiple sclerosis research and was an instigator of the Bay to Bay walkway and cycleway.

Strathfield Young Citizen of the Year 2010 is Tyson Parcell. In 2009 Mr Parcell was awarded the best all-rounder award at Homebush Boys High School for his leadership, academic results, sporting achievements and community services, including efforts for the Exodus Foundation, the Uganda Children’s Fund and Stewart House.

Burwood Council awarded Citizen of the Year award to Mr Neville Snow, Young Citizen of the Year award to Mr Thomas Stephouls and Sports Award to the Burwood Football Club over-50s team for their community spirit.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all of the Australia Day 2010 award recipients and offer a warm welcome to our new Australian citizens. I know that in my electorate of Lowe we are fortunate to have so many wonderful community members who contribute their talents and resources to make our electorate the fantastic place it is to live in, and I encourage all of my constituents to participate in 2010.

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**MAIN COMMITTEE**
Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (4.17 pm)—World Wetlands Day is celebrated in February each year, and last Saturday, 6 February, I attended the revegetation planting event on the banks of Lake Goollelal for World Wetlands Day. This event was organised by the National Trust WA and the Department of Environment and Conservation to improve the habitat for native birds and animals and help improve the water quality of Lake Goollelal, part of the Yellagonga Regional Park. There is little doubt that Lake Goollelal is an impressive part of the Cowan electorate—stunning scenery, accessible to the public and an excellent example of diverse flora and fauna. What exists there is due in no small part to the long-term efforts of the Friends of Yellagonga and the Department of Environment and Conservation. I congratulate them for what they have achieved. But, as Saturday demonstrated, there is always more work to be done.

That being said, despite the work involved in the plantings, my daughters and I always greatly enjoy these events. In 2010 we were again at the same planting location as 2009, near the Luisini Winery site. The objective of planting hundreds of sedges is to restrict weed growth and greatly improve the health of the area. It was interesting to see the strong growth of the plants from last year, and my daughters commented on how they had been responsible for some of those.

Following on from the successful event in 2009, the Department of Environment and Conservation provided even more plants this year. The planting took almost the whole two hours, resulting in strong coverage of plants over the target area. World Wetlands Day is a good day to highlight Lake Goollelal, as the lake is an excellent example of a wetland adjacent to an urban area. I look forward to a strong turnout of local people next year and the planting of many more sedges.

Although this planting day is undertaken each year, it is important to again note the role of the Friends of Yellagonga. The friends work closely and in a coordinated manner with the Department of Environment and Conservation. Their mission is to promote and participate in the conservation, rehabilitation and protection of the Yellagonga Regional Park to ensure long-term environmental sustainability and compatible human use. The committee comprises the chair, Will Carstairs; vice-chair, Peter Jacoby; treasurer, John Stenton; secretary, Heather Chester; nursery manager, Frank Parrotte; volunteer coordinator, Graham Sinclair; and general committee members Kevin McLeod, John Chester, Marian Napier-Winch and Sue Walker.

I know that the friends are concerned not only with diversity issues to do with flora but also with the protection of native fauna and the control of introduced species. In particular, it is suspected that the park’s turtles are the subject of poaching. I certainly hope that those responsible can be caught and prosecuted. The friends are also concerned with the persistent fox and feral pig problem in the park. These species represent a significant threat to the biodiversity of the regional park. I believe that this is only the second time ever that the Friends of Yellagonga Regional Park have been mentioned in the House of Representatives. I am happy to have been the one to speak of their efforts on both occasions.
Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.20 pm)—I rise today to commend some of the great community work that has taken place over the last few months in the rejuvenation of the Newcastle CBD and, in particular, the Hunter Street Mall. Over three Friday nights in December of last year the Red Lantern Night Markets lit up the mall and surrounding streets. Market stalls from local artists and designers, as well as some great food, had the area buzzing with a lively atmosphere not seen for some time. Crowds of Novocastrians filled the streets, making the most of the summer weather and eclectic Christmas shopping opportunities. Those visitors spilled over into the retail shops, which opened for the evening. There was no talk of barriers, such as railway lines or parking. There were no excuses, just good entrepreneurship and successful creative ideas. Coordinated by Justine Gaudry, Alison Buchanan and Rebecca Thomson, the markets were supported by L!vesites, a Newcastle City Council initiative promoting cultural events held across the Newcastle area. These individuals and groups must be congratulated for their efforts. This event coincided with Newcastle City Council’s decision to finally open the mall to traffic—another successful initiative.

Prominent among the features of the markets were the wildly successful Renew Newcastle projects. A local not-for-profit organisation, Renew Newcastle was established to find short- and medium-term uses for buildings in Newcastle’s CBD that are currently vacant, disused or awaiting development. Renew Newcastle aims to find artists, cultural projects and community groups to use and maintain these buildings until they become commercially viable or are actually redeveloped. It is not set up to manage long-term uses. It is not a property provider or manager. It just aims to generate activity in buildings that would otherwise sit there empty until a future long-term activity happens.

The Rudd government has been supporting the CBD too, with $8½ million to support the relocation of the Newcastle Regional Museum into the CBD. It is those sorts of policies that are complementing the work of Newcastle City Council and Renew Newcastle. Renew Newcastle was also recognised last year with a City of Newcastle Service Award for the outstanding contributions it made to the revitalisation of the Newcastle city centre. Marcus Westbury, its leader, was awarded Newcastle Citizen of the Year for 2010. I congratulate Marcus. I also had the pleasure of awarding a community volunteer award to Marcus Westbury last year. The Renew Newcastle project has been a breath of fresh air to the CBD, and it could not have happened without his tireless work.

Renew Newcastle’s work in the Hunter Street Mall continues. This Friday just past saw the first Renew Newcastle exhibitions of 2010 in the Loop Space and Totoro’s Tea House, both located in the mall. I commend Marni Jackson, a board member of Renew Newcastle, for the work she has undertaken in making such projects a success. I give my support to the regeneration of the CBD of Newcastle and the wonderful, creative entrepreneurship being shown. (Time expired)

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (4.23 pm)—I wish to raise the very important issue of special disability trusts. A constituent of mine, Ray Walter, has a disabled son for whom he and his wife are trying to establish a trust to ensure that their son has adequate funds for the foreseeable future. Mr and Mrs Walter are self-funded retirees, so they understand the importance of self-reliance and are trying to do their best not just for their son but to ensure that he is not a bur-
den on taxpayers, as far as that can be done. Mr Walter and several other parents have worked extremely hard in looking at legislation and making some very valuable submissions to the government as to how this form of trust could be established.

Unfortunately, progress on this important issue seems to be bogged down in the debate over taxation, with concerns that a trust has the potential to be used for tax avoidance. The people who want to use this form of trust all have disabled family members, which should be a criterion which would eliminate the sort of people who are just looking for a convenient tax loophole. One of the government’s complaints is that the suggestions by Mr Walter and other family members of disabled Australians would result in the beneficiaries of SDTs enjoying more favourable tax treatment than beneficiaries of other trusts—a letter from the Treasurer’s office of 8 December 2009. I would have thought that this was not unreasonable.

The alternative to having money put aside in trusts—the families’ own money, I might add—giving a significant saving to the taxpayer as well as improving the lives of those disabled Australians, is that the Australian taxpayer will once again have an impost imposed. Moreover, there are many instances where, because of government policy, tax incentives or more favourable tax treatment are extended to certain sectors of the community. The Treasurer’s letter states that there are probably only 5,000 families who would benefit from these trusts in the first four years, which is hardly opening the floodgates to massive tax implications. Although the tax effects are of genuine interest, the government should appreciate that they need to be looking after the Prime Minister’s favourite working families who are trying to look after disabled relatives, and to be relying on merely the financial bottom line does not speak well for a government trying to paint itself as caring and socially responsible. I urge the Treasurer to establish fair and equitable disability trusts as soon as possible.

**Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve**

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (4.26 pm)—At the time of Steve Irwin’s death in 2005 he was one of the most recognised and respected Australian faces here in Australia and even more so right around the world. Former Prime Minister John Howard, to his credit, arranged a $6 million federal government grant to purchase 135,000 hectares in northern Cape York, preserve it as part of the national reserve system and name it the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve as a tribute to the life and conservation work of Australia’s crocodile hunter. According to the federal Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, a stunning array of wildlife roams the property, including the endangered northern quoll and the great palm cockatoo. Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve is home to six highly vulnerable plant species. The nearby Wenlock River is the richest in freshwater fish diversity of any Australian river, including speartooth sharks, sawfish and the estuarine crocodile. Of the 32 ecosystems found on the reserve, 21 are threatened. Many of these are found nowhere else in the world but in Cape York. The department of the environment says that preserving them is of global importance.

You would assume, then, given this history, that nothing could possibly go wrong. Regrettably, this is not the case. A mining company named Cape Alumina has lodged a request to strip mine over 12,000 hectares in the western part of Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve for bauxite. The result, according to Steve Irwin’s widow, Terry Irwin, will be a total loss of original biodiversity, including all vegetation and wildlife. She says regenerated trees will lack the hollows that are crucial for nesting birds, possums and goannas. She also says that removing
the bauxite would dramatically change the natural water flows to the unique and fragile rain-
forest springs on the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and damage the Wenlock River system.

I want to join with my parliamentary colleague Senator Mark Furner, I want to join with
the nine scientists who have submitted a detailed report on the area and I want to join with the
over 217,000 people who have signed the petition to save Steve’s place in saying there should
be no strip mining in Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. In the south we have made a lot of mis-
takes. We have wrecked areas in the Murray-Darling Basin like the Macquarie marshes and
the Coorong. I do not think they will ever be the same again. Can’t we at least learn from
these sad stories and resolve to do better with Cape York Peninsula, starting with the Steve
Irwin Wildlife Reserve? I urge the Queensland and federal governments to reject the strip
mining proposal. Do it for Steve, do it for those rare fish, birds and plants, and above all do it
for all those children and young people who want this area to be as beautiful in 10 years, 20
years, 100 years as it is today.

Ms Burke—In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members’ constituency
statements has concluded.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2009-2010

Cognate bill:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2009-2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 February, on motion by Dr Emerson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Dr STONE (Murray) (4.29 pm)—I wish to speak to these bills, Appropriation Bill (No. 3)
2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010, in the tradition of the wide-ranging
debate that such bills allow. In particular, I want to talk about an extraordinary circumstance
in Australia that I do not think a lot of people acknowledge or want to believe, and that is the
extraordinary gender pay gap that exists between men and women in Australia. It is an ex-
traordinary circumstance that equal pay was granted as a right by the Australian Conciliation
and Arbitration Commission 40 years ago. I think if you spoke to the average man or woman
in the street, they would say, ‘Of course, men and women should be and probably are being
paid the same for equal work.’ In fact, the average industry gender pay gap stands at around
17 per cent today and, with some industries, like finance and insurance, this gap rises up to
about 31.9 per cent—nearly 32 per cent—and that is an unacceptable situation. In the differ-
ent states there is a lot of variation in how this gender pay gap stands. Western Australia, de-
spite their extraordinary boom conditions and the wage potential for many workers, has a gap
of some 35.7 per cent between the average income of males and females.

An excellent report called Making it fair was produced last year by the House of Represen-
tatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, and I draw a lot of my
data from this report. But, quite clearly, it takes more than a report being tabled in this parlia-
ment for this government to act. Despite this government claiming to be the friend of the
worker, the friend of the downtrodden, the friend of those who are socially isolated or ex-
cluded, we have the extraordinary circumstance of the gender pay gap widening. It is greater
today than it was five years ago.
We need to look very carefully, in today's age of demographic strains and an ageing population, at what this will mean in terms of workforce participation and productivity into the future but also in relation to social equity—to giving all people a fair go in Australia—and I urge this government to consider very seriously why the gender pay gap exists and then to do something very deliberate and active about the problem. There are over 60 recommendations in the Making it fair report. I would hope a substantial proportion of those recommendations would be followed up, although I must confess that there is a lot about manipulating regulations and less about the various industries making some changes based on it not being acceptable in our society to pay differently for the same work.

In describing gender pay gaps a lot of people immediately assume that, because women tend to go into caring roles, roles where there is often part-time work, roles with less qualification requirements, perhaps that is an explanation for the gender pay gap and they say, 'What do you expect if you choose to work in child care? Of course you are not going to be paid very much.' But the point is that, in our society and our economy, the higher you go in terms of qualifications and pay levels, the bigger this gender pay gap becomes. Unfortunately, we have a situation in the business sector with women representing less than two per cent of chief executive officers in Australia. Only two per cent of Australia's top 200 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange are chaired by women, and this number is declining. Women who study law or accountancy make up a greater proportion of the graduates from those courses. They have more than their fair share of awards as highest achievers of results obtained in those courses in the best universities in the country. But, when they step out in their first year of employment in very similar job situations, they experience substantially less pay. This cannot and should not be tolerated, and we need to ask why this situation has continued.

At the same time as we have this declining gender pay equity, we have a substantial increase in the number of women working. Between 1994 and 2008, there was a 41 per cent increase in female employment and a 42 per cent increase in the hours worked. So women are trying to do their best in participating in the economy but it is in the face of substantial discrimination and lack of equity when it comes to their pay. Women are overrepresented in low-paying jobs and in casual and part-time work but, as I said before, that is not the reason for this substantial gender pay inequity. The gender pay inequity is most prevalent across higher paying industries where qualifications are at the degree or post graduate level.

Obviously at the heart of the gender pay gap is a failure to truly value what has been called traditional women's work, whether paid or unpaid, in Australia. But we do have a number of definitions of what is behind this gender pay gap in Australia. I will quote the Queensland government, who elaborated on the concept of pay equity when giving their contribution to the House of Representatives committee late last year. They said 'a larger application than equal pay'—that is, equal pay for the same work—is behind the concept of pay equity and that the concept of pay equity must include issues like:

... entrenched historical practices, the invisibility of women's skills, the lack of a powerful presence in the industrial system—
in other words, shame on the unions—

and the way that 'work' and how we value work is understood and interpreted in the industrial system. The ACTU itself has had much to say about the problems, saying:
Pay equity promotes greater labour force participation of women, enhancing the quality of the Australian labour market and assisting in sustaining the tax base of an ageing population.

Treasury modelling shows that a modest 2.5% increase in labour participation rates would produce an additional 9% increase in economic output by 2022.

So, even if we ignore the equity issues and the discrimination against women in the workplace, there are very sound economic reasons why we must address this very serious problem.

There are a number of contributing factors in this pay inequity situation. The factors contributing to pay inequity are undeniably complex and multifaceted, but let me select a few from the Making it fair report. There are ‘social expectations and gendered assumptions about the role of women as workers, parents and carers resulting in the majority of primary unpaid caring responsibilities being undertaken by women’. For a lot of employers when they look at the employment of a woman—particularly if she is of a child-bearing age or of an age when she may have an ageing parent—have an expectation that she will be less reliable in the workplace, that she will be taking time off work for her caring responsibility, at some cost to the task, job or business at hand.

Then there is the disproportionate participation of women in part-time and casual employment, leading to few opportunities for skill development and advancement. That results in a concentration of women in lower-level classifications. We know that is a fact but we also know that women who succeed in becoming well educated and, in fact, out-perform men in, for example, law courses or in banking and finance, still face inequities—in fact, some of the greatest pay gap inequities. But then there is also the ‘invisibility of women’s skills and status, leading to an undervaluation of women’s work and the failure to reassess a changing nature of work and skill. Unrecognised skills are described as creative, nurturing, caring and so forth’, rather than as highly productive and skilled.

Another obvious reason for this gender pay gap is ‘sex discrimination and sexual harassment’. Then we have ‘working in the service industry rather than in the product related markets’. There is a cultural response to work in Australia which says that if you work in services you can be paid less than if you are actually selling a product in the market or you are involved in market development.

Then there is the ‘poor recognition of qualifications, including vastly different remuneration scales for occupations requiring similar qualifications, and the way that work and how we value work is understood and interpreted within the industrial system’. For example, compare how a four-year trained preschool teacher is paid compared to a four-year trained secondary school teacher. One is vastly more undervalued than the other in the status of their work, their career opportunities and their remuneration. ‘Women receive lower levels of discretionary payment as well, such as overaward payments, bonuses, commissions, service increments and profit sharing. This is partly because in the industries where women are mostly employed overaward payments are not usually available.’

I find it shameful to live in a country such as Australia, a developed nation, in the 21st century, where this gender inequity persists and is getting worse. It was referred to in question time today, but last week I was ashamed when representatives of nursing homes in New South Wales and Queensland came to parliament. The Australian Nursing Federation tells us that thousands of aged-care nurses, in particular in Queensland and New South Wales, will lose up to $300 a week under the award modernisation program of this federal government, led by the
Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. I repeat: these workers—almost universally women—in the aged-care sector, one of our most significant areas of growth in demand for services into the near future, will lose up to $300 a week under the award modernisation program. How can this be tolerated? Of course we have Julia Gillard, the minister responsible for this area, denying that that is a fact:

Ms Gillard said the commission had “worked through those issues in a satisfactory way”. She said she did not accept figures that aged-care nurses could lose up to $300 a week under the award modernisation.

The decision of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission is there for everybody to read. Indeed, the new pay rates for the 15,000 award-covered nurses in the two states will result, again, in a widening of the gender pay gap for women. I think this is a disgrace. I wonder why a lot of women persist in careers like child care, early childhood education, nursing and the services sector when they can look across the room and see a male doing similar or the same work but being paid substantially more. It is an insult and a lot of women feel it is a personal affront to their self-esteem. As the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, Making it fair, found:

The value of paid work is not only about money. Women who realise that someone else in the workplace received different remuneration levels take it as ‘a personal affront and a personal problem’ and perceive the difference in terms of how they are valued. Paid work is ‘an important aspect of … [women’s] identity and allows them to use their skills and continue to develop professionally’.

We have to worry today when we are told that this government is going to re-examine what constitutes a skill in demand in the economy. That is an important thing to do. The coalition supports close monitoring of the skills in demand in our economy and making sure, for example, that migration matches our needs in this country and the potential for newcomers to find work. On the other hand, we need to scrutinise decisions made by this government, given its record and response to pay equity issues. We also need to make sure that skills in demand, as well as wage levels, accurately reflect need and are not simply perpetuating cultural differences and, too often, the lack of power of women in the workplace.

In the 21st century, Australia is leading the world, particularly the OECD, in giving women opportunities for education. Australia is typically cited as No. 1 when it comes to women and girls having equal educational opportunity. Their outcomes in terms of completing school and completing higher education, training and university qualifications are amongst the best in the world. Of course that is a lumpy statistic. We know Indigenous women are way behind their non-Indigenous sisters. Overall, Australia can be proud of the educational opportunities it gives to women and girls.

On the other hand, we need to stand ashamed at the gender wage gap. We need to work comprehensively to, first of all, inform the population at large about the gender wage gap across all levels of the workforce, from the lowest paid to the highest paid. We have to do away with the concept that a male breadwinner typically predominates in households. It has been suggested that the higher salaries and promotion opportunities for men are particularly derived from that myth: that there is a male breadwinner in a household and that therefore management assumes men will have longer careers than women and that inevitably they will not leave the workforce to rear children as women will.
There is a whole range of problems for women with this government, including its extraordinarily poor response to paid parental leave. I was quite shocked to look at the details of the government’s policy for paid parental leave which is due for delivery in 2011. It will provide way below six months of paid parental leave—universally regarded as inadequate, particularly by the Productivity Commission. There should be at least a six-month opportunity for a woman or a primary carer to be with their newborn. That amount of paid parental leave, as presented at the moment by the Labor government, is an insult to women.

We also have a decline in funding for women who experience domestic violence. There has been a decline in funds to help train women in English language, particularly refugee and migrant women. We have seen the support for dysfunctional families falling away across Australia. We have seen the emergency response to the crisis in Indigenous communities in Northern Australia not continue to be delivered in the way that the Howard government began. We have example after example of this government paying lip-service to equality and social inclusion. It even has a title of ‘social inclusion’ tagged on to the Deputy Prime Minister. When you look to see what is happening for men and women in Australia, particularly women, you will be significantly concerned that indicators of equity and a fair go show that women are doing much more poorly. Women are having a much more difficult experience with life chances and life circumstances than they did under previous governments—for example, the John Howard government.

I do not know why we continue to tolerate the gender equity gap, but I will be doing all I can as the shadow minister for the status of women to put forward policies that do the right thing for Australia’s women. It is important in terms of women’s experience of life in respecting our values of social justice and equity. It is also of critical importance for our economy as we approach a time where additional productivity will be essential to deal with an ageing population. We know that women will more often be the poorer aged Australians in the years to come. There is a feminisation of poverty in Australia. I do not think anyone should be other than shocked and concerned about the level of poverty that women experience compared to men. It is not tolerable, but it is tolerated by this government and I think that is a dreadful shame.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (4.49 pm)—I am pleased to speak in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. In just over two years, the Rudd government has already delivered a massive program of reform, but there is more to be done. Through this parliament, we have abolished Work Choices and, in doing so, restored fairness to Australian workplaces and provided greater security and peace of mind to millions of working families, especially to younger workers, working mothers and workers from our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Through this parliament, we have delivered $47 billion in tax cuts, making all working families better off; we have already delivered nearly 300,000 new computers for schools; we have all but finalised, finally, a single national school curriculum; and we are delivering new trades training centres and language labs in our high schools and new halls and libraries in our primary schools as part of our education revolution.

In the electorate of Moreton alone, total funding through Building the Education Revolution is $77,975,011. I will take you on a bit of a quick walk through some of the things taking place in Moreton. The National School Pride program is supporting 38 schools and 85 pro-
jects with total program funding of $6,005,006. It is providing things like classrooms for students with disabilities. We have upgraded communication equipment. We have shade sails, ICT upgrades to classrooms, music rooms and interactive whiteboards. We have resurfaced basketball and tennis courts. We have ICT integration that brings wireless expansion and we have covered walkways, to name just a few.

Then we look at Primary Schools for the 21st Century, with 30 schools and 49 projects and with total program funding of $68,050,005. It is supporting schools such as Christ the King School at Graceville, which has constructed a covered learning area and a library for $2 million. Coopers Plains has done slightly better, getting a new multipurpose hall and resource centre for $2,000,001. Eight Mile Plains has a classroom and resource centre for $2 million again. Graceville State School has $3 million. MacGregor State School has a resource centre and multipurpose hall for $3 million. Moorooka State School has a multipurpose hall and resource centre for $2½ million. Our Lady of Lourdes School in Sunnybank has multipurpose spaces for $1,641,000 and a hall for $1,359,000. Robertson State School has a multipurpose hall and library for $3 million. Runcorn Heights State School has a new multipurpose hall and resource centre for $3 million. Runcorn State School at Sunnybank has a multipurpose hall and resource centre for $3 million. Salisbury State School has a new resource centre and multipurpose hall for $2 million. Sherwood State School has a multipurpose hall and resource centre for $3 million. Southside Christian College has six primary craft rooms for $2 million. St Brendan’s Primary School in Moorooka has $2 million for a library and a hall. St Elizabeth’s School in Tarragindi has multipurpose spaces for $2½ million. St Pius X Catholic School in Salisbury has a new hall, stair and covered areas for $2 million. St Sebastian’s Primary School in Yeronga has a library and classrooms for $2 million. Stretton State College has a new library for $1 million and a multipurpose hall for $2 million. Sunnybank Hills State School has classrooms to the value of $3 million. Sunnybank State School has a new multipurpose hall and new resource centre for $2½ million. Warrigal Road State School at Eight Mile Plains has classrooms and a multipurpose hall for $3 million. Wellers Hill State School has a multipurpose hall and resource centre for $3 million. Yeronga State School has a multipurpose hall and resource centre for $3 million.

If we move on to the science and language centres, three schools received funding of $3,920,000. Milperra State High’s project ‘Equitable access for newly arrived students of migrant and refugee backgrounds’ is receiving nearly $1½ million; Nyanda State High, down the road from me at Salisbury, is receiving a science and technology centre worth $1.2 million; and Yeronga State High is receiving a language learning centre worth $1.3 million. That is a quick walk through some of the projects that are taking place as part of the education revolution—not just flagpoles but significant building improvements and significant changes to the future for our students and our nation’s future.

We are helping restore the health of the Murray-Darling, we are investing record funds in solar and wind power and we are training more nurses and more GPs. We are cleaning up after the mess that Tony Abbott made when he was the Minister for Health and Ageing, when he ripped a billion dollars out of the health system. We are investing in cancer research. We are delivering the biggest infrastructure program in the nation’s history. We are building new roads, new highways, new railways and new ports. We are building a national broadband network and we are delivering on hospitals and schools, as I walked you through in my elector-
Mr Wood—Not in my electorate.

Mr Perrett—I think that, if the member opposite is suggesting that he has no building sites in his schools, he is misleading the chamber. Every electorate, under the education revolution, is benefiting from the economic stimulus package. The Rudd, Gillard and Swan leadership team has steered the country through the toughest global economic conditions experienced for three generations—since the Great Depression.

These reforms, these major achievements, would not have happened if the Rudd government had not been elected. All of these reforms, measures and productivity gains strike at the very heart of what we are about as a government, and they reflect the sort of country we want Australia to be. Do we want to be a country that decided that tackling climate change was just too hard? Do we want to be the nation that squibs it? No, we do not. Do we want our ports, roads and internet to be crippled by bottlenecks or do we want to have the kind of infrastructure we need to drive productivity, innovation and employment? Do we want our kids to have a mediocre education, where they have got a new flagpole but not much else? Or do we want to deliver an education revolution in this country that will ensure that all of our kids are the smartest, the most innovative and the drivers of change into the future? That is what I hope for my two young boys. My older boy, Stanley, will be the age that I am now in 2050, when I will be nudging four score and seven. Hopefully by then my working life will be coming to an end and maybe I will be turning to my children for support. We need to make sure that all of our children are given as many opportunities as possible.

Do we want to be a country that is consumed by political division, or do we want to work together to tackle common challenges? As a nation, Australia is now at a fork in the road. We need to decide now the kind of country we are to be. When we look at research, like the **Inter-generational report** released by the Treasurer last week, we need to consider the implications for the Australians of today and the Australians of tomorrow. As a government, we will not respond by burying our heads in the sand or by going for the glib, quick political line. Kevin Rudd knows how to make the tough decisions that can shore up our nation’s future. The Rudd government knows how to grasp the nettle. Consider our response to the global financial crisis—a response which the latest employment figures tell us has supported 200,000 jobs and numerous small businesses. When I visit the small business owners in my electorate of Moreton, I am proud that I can look them in the eye and know that the Rudd government did what it could to help protect their businesses and to help them protect the jobs of their employees. It is all part of the Rudd government’s agenda, which includes two stimulus packages, our infrastructure rollout and our education revolution. These programs were not just about protecting our economy and jobs throughout the duration of the financial crisis. They are targeted measures to boost Australia’s long-term productivity and secure our economy—not just up until election night but for the sake of future generations. Take the education revolution, for example. I listed the example of Moreton, but I am sure that every MP in the House would be able to list many initiatives in their schools and in their communities.

The aims of the education revolution are twofold. They are, firstly, to provide quality education now and, secondly, to provide greater productivity for the long term. On this side, we believe that no student should be denied access to quality education—no matter where they
live; no matter what their parents do for a quid; no matter their age, race or religion; no matter what sign is above the school gate; and no matter which federal MP represents them in this place. It does not matter. They all deserve quality teaching and quality resources, and the education revolution will achieve this. Those opposite gave flagpoles; we are giving flagships. They put plaques under their flagpoles; we are putting up libraries. We are putting up language centres. We are putting up resource centres. We are putting up classrooms. The Rudd and Gillard education revolution will ensure that, in the years to come, we have an educated and skilled workforce primed to take part in the new jobs and the new challenges of the future. These young people will be the ones driving productivity as our community ages. Isn’t it great to have a community where people are talking about education? Since the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, launched the My School website, many people are talking about education and what it means for the future of Australia. My youngest son, Leo, will be celebrating his 40th birthday in the year 2050, so I have a strong vested interest in this revolution being successful.

Consider our infrastructure agenda: jobs in the short term but productivity gains in the long term. The global financial crisis meant that there was an economic imperative behind the infrastructure agenda. It was about keeping people off the unemployment queues. Nevertheless, all of this infrastructure—the roads, the rail, the ports and the broadband internet communications—allow Australian businesses to get on with what they do best, which is making money, employing workers and paying taxes. The greater efficiencies in our transport and freight network are crucial to improving productivity. Productivity is not a four-letter word and the bottlenecks of years gone by do not improve our standard of living.

Last month I joined the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Minister Albanese, and other south side MPs Bernie Ripoll and Karen Struthers to fix the final sleeper on the goods rail line to Acacia Ridge in my electorate. I did an okay job, but thankfully another 120 workers had been there before me and laid the other 105,000 concrete sleepers. I was happy to play a very small part in laying that last sleeper. The $55.8 million line upgrade was delivered as part of our economic stimulus plan. It replaced old wooden sleepers with new concrete sleepers and installed new lines and new signals. This new 101-kilometre line ensures greater track capacity and allows more freight to be transported by rail. The project also created 120 jobs.

The project also delivered on an aspiration dating back as far as Federation for a national rail network connecting all mainland states. I think it was actually a COAG initiative from the early 1920s, where the Premiers and the Prime Minister of the day would have gone to the meeting by boat, horse and buggy, and train. Six separate state-based arrangements have been done away with today and we now have one set of common rules, operating standards and access regulations in place. It only took about 90 years to get it right, but the Rudd government was able to deliver. As we move to a nationwide standard-gauge rail network, freight operators can now access 11,000 kilometres of track, extending all the way from Acacia Ridge in Brisbane to Melbourne in the south and Kalgoorlie in the west. This is the kind of productivity boost our infrastructure investments are delivering all around the country—more jobs in the short term but also productivity gains in the long term.

Now let us look at the productivity record of the Howard and Costello government. Let us look at the productivity cycles in Australia since 1992, after the Hawke and Keating govern-
ments did all the heavy lifting and the workers of Australia made many compromises in the eighties and early nineties, which any economics student would recognise. Let us look at the productivity cycles. Productivity has gone down significantly from the mid-nineties, when it was at 3.3 per cent, to the late nineties—the start of the noughties—when it was 2.2 per cent. If we look at the cycle leading up to when we took government, it was at 1.1 per cent. In fact, when we took government, productivity, the major indication of a successful economy, was at nought, zero, nada, nothing—a sure sign of one of the laziest governments when it comes to reforming Australia’s history.

Putting aside climate change, one of our core challenges is to address our core economic problem for the future—not just in this, the second decade of the 21st century, but for the 21st century at large. What is it? Obviously, if we look at productivity, the core challenge is the ageing of our population. Consider this simple statistic: the share of our population over the age of 65 will increase from 12 or 13 per cent of our total population today to nearly 25 per cent of our population in 2050—from one in seven of our number to one in four of our number. So, as I have said, when my son Leo is celebrating his 40th birthday, more than one in four people will be over 65—including his dad, hopefully. Our overall population will rise. It will be a bigger Australia. But the ageing of the population will rise even faster. Forty years ago, in 1970, there were 7.5 people in the workforce for every one person over the age of 65. Today, there are about 5.5 workforce participants for every person over 65. By 2050 that number will drop to 2.7 people in the workforce for every person over 65. This is the core challenge, and it is a scary challenge.

Two things flow from this population dynamic. The first is that, because we are going to have a much larger number of older Australians, older Australians will command more services in health and hospitals, in aged care and also in retirement income. On average, hospital expenditure on people aged 65 to 74 is currently double that of people aged 55 to 64. For our oldest Australians—those aged 85 and over—spending increases to almost five times that spent on people aged 55 to 65.

Last week Treasurer Wayne Swan released the Intergenerational report entitled Australia to 2050: future challenges. Treasury analysis contained in the report points to the fact that over the next 40 years real health spending on those aged 65 and older is expected to increase around seven fold. Real health spending on those aged 85 and over is expected to increase 12 fold. That is why it is ridiculous to have a leader of the opposition who ripped a billion dollars out of the health system standing up and saying we now need to have a talk about health. This is the product of the increasing age of Australians overall and, secondly, the fact that, with innovations in pharmaceuticals and medical technologies and the rest, the cost of treating each individual aged Australian will rise as well. That is our first problem. Obviously there are not too many drug companies out there that are charities.

The second problem is of course that the proportion of Australians in the workforce generating the tax revenue to support these services will become less. In 1970 Australian government spending on health equated to 1.2 per cent of gross domestic product. Now, Australian government health spending equates to four per cent of GDP, and the Intergenerational report projects that it will rise to 7.1 per cent in 2050. In dollar terms that is an increase of over $200 billion by 2050 and equates to an increase in real terms in average Australian government
health spending per person from about two grand today to about seven grand in 2050. This is why we need major health reform.

What are our options when faced with rising health costs on the one hand and the number of Australians working declining proportionally on the other hand, in turn generating less economic activity and less taxation revenue? Obviously you have to improve productivity, which is why the Rudd government has committed to those innovations in education, broadband, infrastructure and the like. I wish those opposite would get on board and embrace in this House what they embrace out there in their electorates.

The bills before the House provide additional funding for the successful Home Insulation Program and the Solar Homes and Communities Plan. The Rudd government is continuing to invest in quality projects delivering quality outcomes for all Australians, not just for now but for the future, and I am proud to commend the bills to the House.

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (5.07 pm)—I also wish to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. I am not sure if you have seen the movie Groundhog Day with Bill Murray. It is a fantastic movie in which no matter what he does every morning he wakes up and nothing has changed from the day before. What that reminds me of is Building the Education Revolution because at my schools in Berwick, whatever they do, every day the principals, the staff, the students and the teachers get up in the morning and they go to school and nothing changes.

I want to speak first of all in particular about Berwick Primary School. This school has a great team led by Principal Kaye Seton, who has been doing a fantastic job, and school president Jason Barlow. It is interesting that they were very conservative when they sought money from Building the Education Revolution. Rather than go for $3 million, they thought that they would just ask for $2 million.

Mr Ripoll interjecting—

Mr WOOD—The Labor members opposite—Bernie Ripoll in particular—think it is funny that one of my schools is getting ripped off by the state government. I think it is a disgrace and the Labor members should take this very seriously.

The school only asked for $2 million and they thought they were being very fair and very generous. With that, they wanted a multipurpose room; it sounded like a great idea and everyone thought it was worth while. They then realised that the amount of money they would be seeking would not be $2 million. The quotes they had from architects were in the vicinity of $650,000. Because they thought the government would be flexible they said, ‘Can we use the remaining money to upgrade our gymnasium?’ The school has now got 800-plus students and they thought that if they upgraded the gymnasium with the remaining funding it would be of great benefit to the school. They did the right thing. They did not come straight to me and seek support and nor did they go to the media. They worked quietly behind the back door trying to get the government to see common sense and make sure that they would get a decision based on common sense and flexibility. What we have seen with Building the Education Revolution is quite the opposite. When they said, ‘Can we actually see the figures for this multipurpose building?’—which had been quoted at $2 million—they were never shown any respect at all. They were never told or shown any quotes. They were just told it cost $2 mil-
lion, and when they said, ‘Hang on; our quotes are saying it is $650,000’, that meant absolutely nothing.

So we wrote to the Minister for Education on 24 June last year saying that Berwick Primary School—and they were doing the right thing; they were doing it all behind closed doors without going to the media—wanted to use the remaining funding. They deserved the funding. The commitment was $2 million. Remember that they did not go for the full amount of $3 million. They wanted to use the remaining funding for a secondary project. Sadly, they have had no good news from the minister. We wrote again on 1 December and again we have had no good news on Berwick Primary School.

I congratulate Jade Lawton from the Pakenham-Berwick Gazette for her article on 18 November 2009. This is not a happy photo. You can see the president of the school council, Jason Barlow, standing in front of the half-sized gymnasium they have at the moment, and also Emily Lidgerwood and the principal, Kaye Seton. It is not a happy photo; it is not a happy story. This should have been a great story to tell in my electorate, but what has been proved many, many times is that the Rudd government is very good at speaking the rhetoric but not very good at actually delivering. The students at Berwick Primary School are missing out. It is outrageous that they are missing out on the additional funding. It is very unfair that when the school have assemblies, for example, not all the students can fit in the gymnasium. When they first undertook the building works, it was designed so that the gymnasium could expand, and it is just a disgrace that the government is not offering the school the flexibility to use the additional money which they were promised. It is very sad to see that take place.

It is not the only school in the area that has been affected. In fact, I seem to have a number of schools in my electorate facing the same dilemma. I do not know how many times I have spoken in the House about Berwick Lodge Primary School—another school, of course, in the suburb of Berwick. The principal, Henry Grossek, is doing an amazing job out there with the students and has been an ambassador in keeping the government to account on its Building the Education Revolution. Remember that this has cost $14 billion, so you want to make sure the money is wisely spent. Henry was promised $3 million, and he thought, ‘That’s fantastic!’ He thought they would use that money wisely. What they wanted to do was build a library and six classrooms. Any member would think it would be a great idea to use the money for actual education. But, instead, the school was told that they would have to use one of four or five templates and that they must build a gymnasium. Henry Grossek said: ‘Hang on, the school already has a gymnasium. Why can’t we have a classroom—or six classrooms—and a library?’ He was told, ‘No, that cannot happen.’

We have the ridiculous situation that Beaconsfield Upper Primary School want a gymnasium but have been told they cannot have a gymnasium but need to have classrooms. The schools are 30 minutes away from each other, and one school is getting told they have to have a gymnasium when they want classrooms and the other school is being told they must have classrooms when they want a gymnasium. There is no flexibility in this at all. What the state schools are putting up with is a disgrace. I quote Henry Grossek from 1 April 2009:

At a national level, the program is being implemented in a terrible way. Impossible time lines, apparent lack of any due diligence with respect to the tendering process and an inability of the federal government to at this point in time pull the Victorian government into line. Where is all the money being
siphoned off to? And no idea on process for resolving disputes that schools may get into with the state authorities on what facilities they can have.

We actually thought Henry had had a win with the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. I believe a meeting took place in May last year in which the Deputy Prime Minister acknowledged the concerns of Berwick Lodge Primary School and stated, ‘Yes, you can actually use the money and have the flexibility to build a library and six classrooms.’ The good news is that that issue has finally been resolved; but, as Principal Henry Grossek says, ‘Show us the money; there is still a lot of money out there which should be coming to the school for a secondary project.’ Sadly, that money is not forthcoming.

That is one thing about which Henry met with the Deputy Prime Minister, who as education minister he believed was running the show. He got a guarantee from her that the issue was going to be resolved when he specifically asked her, ‘Can the leftover money be used for a buddy project?’ In the conversation that followed, as it was repeated to me, the principals—I believe there were a number of principals there—were assured that they could have a buddy project. So at the moment there is the crazy situation where there is just no flexibility. There are all these schools in Berwick that are not getting looked after the way they deserve. It is an absolute disgrace.

In the Dandenong Ranges we are getting through the fire season this year. Luckily, so far there have been no major fires, though we did have a small fire up in Emerald the other day. But, with school going back, it seems absolutely crazy to me that not one school in my electorate in the Dandenong Ranges has a sprinkler on its roof. That is the most basic safety measure. If there is a fire and there is an ember attack, you would think you would need a sprinkler on the roof, but there are none.

I have personally great respect for the Attorney-General. He has listened closely to my concerns in my meetings with him. We need to ensure when it comes to schools on catastrophic and extreme fire days that they have a sister or buddy school so that if a school is closed down—for example, up in Ferny Creek or Olinda—the parents know the night before that the next day they need to take their children to a school off the hill. It is common sense.

One of the greatest concerns I have is if a school is closed down for the day and not all parents are as responsible as they should be. This would be especially likely if after two or three of these catastrophic and extreme days they thought to themselves: ‘There is no need to take my child to work or drop him off at nana’s place or leave him with a friend off the mountain. He should be right at home now by himself.’ That is a real concern of the CFA members, too. One thing about having a buddy school is that the principals could check to make sure that all students were accounted for and off the hills safely. The fire precautions for the schools up in the Dandenong Ranges are a disgrace because of the lack of effort that has been put in to make the schools more fire safe.

The No. 1 thing, though, for people to remember is that, if there is a day with catastrophic and extreme fire danger, they have to be off the hill. The concern I have is on one of those days when a fire comes out of the blue. For those who do not know the Dandenong Ranges, a fire can go from the basin to the top of Sassafras in 10 or 12 minutes, as happened in I think 1997 or 2000. It takes a car that long to get up there and that is how fast a fire can move up there. We do not want a situation where the schools are caught out and where the principals and staff have no training in fire management. At the moment, most of the schools do not
have shutters and, as I said, there are no sprinklers. It is a recipe for disaster. I am a strong advocate for having underground bankers at schools. You never know—it could be once in a hundred years or once in 30 years that you have a fire come through and the students and teachers are trapped there. In that situation, you can at least have a bunker. But a lot of research is needed to work out the safest and best way to go forward.

Another concern I have locally is with what is happening to Clyde Road. In the last federal election I announced half the funding to build Clyde Road. Then we had the Prime Minister—then opposition leader—come out. In an article of 21 November 2007, again in the Berwick-Packenham Gazette, by Jim Mynard, the heading is, ‘We’ll fix Clyde Road too, says ALP’. In that article my opponent at the time said that Kevin Rudd and Labor had listened to the concerns of the tens of thousands of residents who used the road every day and wanted it fixed. He said:

... only Kevin Rudd and Labor will work cooperatively with the State Government to do something about it.

They were obviously going to fix it. It all sounded fair and reasonable.

Then we go to Wednesday 9 April, 2008 and an article in the Berwick Leader which quotes Harry Hutchinson, who is one of the local traders. The heading is, ‘Keep your promise.’ It states:

Show me the money!

That’s the call to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd from Berwick Chamber of Commerce president Harry Hutchinson.

The article went on:

Mr Hutchinson said more than 200 businesses in Berwick were directly affected by the choked condition of Clyde Rd. And then there were the thousands of customers and the residents of connecting suburban streets to be considered.

... ... ...

A spokesman for Federal Regional Development Minister Anthony Albanese said the Rudd Government would honour its funding commitment for Clyde Rd.

Then there was a recent article by Jade Lawton in the Berwick-Packenham Gazette. It is a fine article by Jade; she has done a great job. This article says of Clyde Road:

The State Government allocated $1 million to investigate duplicating the bottleneck ...

And we have Harry Hutchins from the Berwick Village Chamber of Commerce calling on the government to do something. They are losing a lot of business down there.

This was a promise made in the last federal election. We heard today in question time the Prime Minister and others talking about keeping their promises but it seems mightily unfair that in the seat of Deakin at the Springvale Road intersection the traffic congestion has been fixed—I am a big supporter of fixing the Springvale Road—and yet at Clyde Road not one sod of soil has been turned.

This government is taking this country into billions and billions of dollars debt. They cannot get the local schools programs working. There is no flexibility there. They are trying to rush them out. The school principals are not happy; the students are not happy. We are supposed to have this beautiful loving relationship between state and federal Labor governments but very sadly there is not much love down in Victoria, especially in the suburb of Berwick.
Again, Clyde Road is a disgrace. We hear the Labor members talk about what a fantastic job they are doing but it is as if they have a huge credit card and all they are doing is spending, spending, spending. Guess what: one day it has to be paid back. Sadly, the day is going to come when residents in my community of Berwick and others have to pay that money back.

Finally, we had the community cabinet come down to the Emerald Secondary College. I had an election commitment—from memory it was for $2.5 million—to the Emerald Secondary College for a performing arts centre. My Labor opponent matched that during the campaign. He did not take the lead much; he always seemed to match my commitments. The only ones he did not match were the environment ones—a wildlife hospital and weed management. Kevin Rudd was quick to go out to Emerald Secondary College to have his community cabinet there and talk about the great job they are doing and all the money they are spending. The only problem is that now Emerald Secondary College are in the situation where they need $500,000 to get the job done but everything has taken too long and there is so much money being wasted by this government. For example, there are the exorbitant costs of the Building the Education Revolution. The school needs another $500,000. The Prime Minister is very keen to go down to Emerald and wave the flag and say what a fantastic job they have done but Emerald Secondary College comes back and says, ‘Hey, we need a helping hand because this has taken so long.’ Remember, they are entitled to $3 million. It just seems mightily unfair that the government has been kicking and screaming. Hopefully, this issue is resolved.

On that note I will leave it, but hopefully the government will come to its senses and look after the schools and students in Berwick. We hear how they are trying to do the right thing but sadly it is just not happening out in my electorate.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (5.25 pm)—Before I turn to the substance of my contribution to this debate, I have to say this. The member for La Trobe may be very disappointed about the money that is being spent in his schools; he may not talk to his school communities and be able to organise for the projects that the schools wish to have funded. But I can say that in the Shortland electorate of New South Wales it is not so. I heard the member for Oxley say that he has none of those problems—so I have none of those problems. So I would have to put it to the House that maybe the member for La Trobe should try representing his electorate just a little better.

I found very interesting his suggestion that every school should have a bunker. I am wondering whether he thinks those bunkers should be funded instead of classrooms, school halls and gymnasiums. I am wondering whether or not he feels that that is the kind of investment that needs to be made in schools. From my point of view, bunkers definitely come second to having the appropriate infrastructure that all schools can use so that kids can go to school and have a good classroom to learn in with state-of-the-art technology or, if the technology is not there, the facility for that to be put in at a later date, because those buildings are up to a standard where the newest technology—smart boards et cetera—can be placed in most classrooms.

The member for La Trobe also said, I think, that the Rudd government is ‘spending, spending, spending’. Just for his edification, the Howard government was very involved in ‘spending, spending, spending’—but it was ‘spending, spending, spending’ in Liberal and National Party held electorates. What a difference an election makes! Prior to the last election, the Shortland electorate got the leftovers from the table. The Shortland electorate was one of
those electorates which the previous government chose to ignore. It chose to ignore the needs of the people who lived in that electorate. It chose to ignore the needs of people in the electorate with the 11th highest number of people over the age of 65. The median income in electorate of Shortland is much lower than the median income in other electorates. So I find it very disappointing that members of the opposition can come into this parliament and complain about money being spent on schools or on roads, or about money being given to local councils, and this happening on an equitable, across-the-board basis as opposed to something like the Regional Partnerships scheme—a scheme which was very popular with the previous government. Under that scheme, money was invested in pet projects in National Party and marginal Liberal electorates. Now, for the first time since I have been a member of this House, the people of Shortland know that they are being treated equitably. They are not being treated as second-class citizens. And that is happening through this budget process.

One area that I would particularly like to concentrate on is the money that is being directed towards local government. As I have already mentioned, local government was very much the poor relative and it is only since the Rudd Labor government has been elected that federal government has embraced local government and recognised it as a third arm of government and given it responsibility for identifying the local infrastructure that is needed in local government areas, and then funding those projects. Lake Macquarie council, which is in the Shortland electorate, has benefited considerably from the money that has been given to local councils. This is something that did not happen under the previous government.

I would like to talk about a couple of these projects. The Rudd government has given $9,715,199 to Wyong Shire Council for local infrastructure and services. That is an enormous amount of money that was not being delivered before and is providing for libraries, schools, sportsgrounds, community centres and waste, sewerage and other services. I would like to talk more about a couple of the projects that actually fall within the Shortland electorate. One of these concerns the Mannering Park walkway, being the construction of a shared pathway between Waverly Road and Griffith Street. It allows the community and visitors to appreciate the lake and move within the catchment area along the designated pathway. Lake Macquarie is the largest saltwater lake in the Southern Hemisphere. Mannering Park is on the foreshore of Lake Macquarie and this is a stunning walkway. It is available to be accessed by people with disabilities. It is a beautiful pathway. Residents are out there in the morning walking and, in addition to that, it is also a tourist attraction. It really is about engendering healthy activities within the community.

The other walkway that was funded under the federal government program was the Buff Point cycleway extension. Once again it is along the foreshore of a lake. This time it is Budgewoi Lake. It allows the community and visitors to appreciate the beautiful lake foreshore. If you are in the area, Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, it is something that you should visit because it is a stunning investment in a local area that is providing infrastructure and engendering a healthy lifestyle. I know that you, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, are very aware of the importance of exercise. When you are in an environment like the environment that such walkways and cycleways create in the Wyong Shire part of the Shortland electorate, I am sure that you would be very supportive of them. Just as we are investing in Wyong Shire, we are also investing over $14 million in the Lake Macquarie council area, funding the same type of infrastructure: libraries, sportsgrounds, pools,
community centres, waste, sewerage and other services that are so vital to the people of Lake Macquarie.

Neither the Mayor of Lake Macquarie nor the Mayor of the Wyong Shire Council are Labor Party members. In fact, the Mayor of Lake Macquarie is an independent member of the New South Wales parliament and defeated a Labor Party person, so he cannot be described in any way as being partisan. I know from speaking to him that he is appreciative of the money and the investment that the federal government has made in Lake Macquarie. He has gone out of his way to say this to me, and I know that he is very, very supportive of all the programs. Likewise, the Mayor of the Wyong Shire has expressed his appreciation of the money that is being invested there and knows how important it is for the area.

One of the unique program projects being funded through the federal program is the extension of the Red Bluff shared pathway in Eleebana. It includes the provision of decking material, handrails and balustrades. It will feature lighting, public art and interpretive signage. It will go across the water, and it will be a unique pathway. It will join up to the rest of the pathway that has already been built around the foreshore of Lake Macquarie. It will take the pathway a stage further, around quite a difficult area. It is something that the council would not have been able to complete had it not received the funding from the federal government. It will be unique, it will be special and it will be something that creates, once again, the opportunity for families and visitors to the area to get out and enjoy the environments of the biggest saltwater lake in the Southern Hemisphere.

One other walkway that I did wish to mention is the final stage of the Fernleigh track. The minister announced funding for that at the end of last year. He has announced that there will be $2 million given for stages four and five of the Fernleigh track, which will lead to the completion of an almost 20-kilometre continuous bikeway/walkway going from Newcastle right out to Belmont. Funds for the construction of the pathway come from the National Bike Path Project, and I believe the track is the largest project to be funded under that scheme. It was funded because it was a unique pathway, because it creates a transport corridor and because it is providing a tourist attraction in the area. It goes through a number of different environments. It also demonstrates that, for once, electorates like Shortland are receiving funding from the federal government, and that funding is based on the need for and the uniqueness of projects, not whether or not they are in a marginal seat.

I also want to acknowledge the funding that has come to the Shortland electorate through the stimulus package and the Building the Education Revolution program. I hear members of the opposition complain about the funding. I have had a lot of communication with schools, and the schools in my electorate are not complaining about the federal government giving money; they are ecstatic. One comment I have had from a principal is that this is the single biggest investment in education that he has seen in his lifetime. He believes that the funding through Primary Schools for the 21st Century will make an enormous difference to the students that attend the school he is principal of.

I must say that I have received universal support for the project across private, independent and Catholic schools and public schools within Shortland electorate. There have been projects such as the refurbishment of student drop-off and pick-up areas. There has been the refurbishment of a number of schools under the National School Pride Program. Schools have become centres of economic activity. You drive past a school and you see that building is taking

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place and work is taking place. Immediately after the project came into being, you could see
that the schools were having facelifts. There was painting taking place. All of a sudden a
situation existed where schools were being transformed.

There have been a number of studies looking at the learning environment that students are
in, and these studies have shown that, if students are in cramped, poorly furnished and poorly
equipped learning centres in schools, their educational outcomes are inferior to those of stu-
dents who are in a learning environment that is well maintained and that has the equipment
that they need. This is what the education revolution is about. It is about ensuring that all
schools are well furnished and are good learning centres.

Places like the Belmont Christian College received $2.5 million for the construction of a li-
brary. Belmont North Public School received $850,000 for a classroom facility upgrade, and I
refer the House to the previous statement by the member for La Trobe. Belmont Public School
received a new COLA and new classroom facilities. Blacksmiths received a new hall and
Budgewoi, new classroom facilities. Caves Beach received a new special programs room and
a COLA. Charlestown received a new hall, a COLA, a classroom facility upgrade and a new
library. It really shows the kinds of projects that have been approved. Charlestown South re-
ceived new classroom facilities and an upgrade of classrooms; Dudley, a hall and COLA;
Eleebana, classroom facilities; Floraville, classroom facilities; and Gateshead, a classroom
facilities upgrade. For all the schools within Shortland electorate there have been projects that
relate to classroom upgrades, halls or COLAs. And who benefits? The students benefit.

The final issue I would like to raise relates to the Belmont Medicare office. I am very
pleased to say that the Belmont Medicare office was opened on 14 December—

Mr Irons—Is that in WA?

Ms HALL—The Belmont Medicare office in New South Wales, in the electorate of Short-
land. It has been well received by the people of the area. It is situated in the Belmont Central
shopping centre and it was opened early, in fact. It has been of great benefit to the people of
the area. As I mentioned earlier, Shortland is an older electorate, and prior to the Howard gov-
ernment closing the previous Belmont Medicare office in 1997 it was one of the busiest of-
fices in the area. The people of the area want me to place on record their thanks to the gov-
ernment for reopening that office, and they are very pleased also that there are some Centre-
link services now available there as well. This is the Rudd government listening to the people
of Shortland electorate and delivering—delivering the Medicare office that the Howard gov-
ernment removed and also delivering to schools and making sure that local government has
the funds to put in place the proper infrastructure that is needed for the 21st century.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (5.45 pm)—I rise to speak on these appropriation bills and wel-
come the opportunity to discuss government spending more broadly and mention some impor-
tant issues and projects pertinent to Canning. Firstly, I would like to note Appropriation Bill
(No. 4) 2009-2010 as it relates to funding for community infrastructure. It is not surprising
that in an election year this bill authorises further funding for community infrastructure—
more cash splashed by a government that does it so well. Don’t get me wrong; I encourage the
government to invest in infrastructure in Canning, but they seem to be reluctant to invest in
many projects. One can only assume that the strategic project funding being authorised in Ap-
propriation Bill (No. 4) will be part of the type of election pork-barrelling strategy that they so
hypocritically accused the Howard government of in 2007. We know that $21 billion of bor-
borrowed money from the stimulus package funding still remains unspent and the Prime Minister wants to keep spending it despite it accumulating huge interest for all Australians.

I find it rather strange that we have the Reserve Bank of Australia wanting to cool the economy by raising interest rates—they did not do it last week, but I will bet with anyone in this place that they will raise them next month—and yet we still see the federal government stimulating the economy. On the one hand, the Reserve Bank is dampening the economy; on the other hand the federal government is still stimulating the economy, with borrowed money. As I said, even the Reserve Bank is backing off, yet the government continues to pour in more and more money, placing increasing pressure on the Australian families and first home buyers, who are staring down the barrel of further interest rate rises. Every rise in interest rates of one-quarter of one per cent adds $55 a month to the average mortgage. That is a lot of money for families already running tight budgets. We hear that some first home buyers already want to hand back their homes because interest rates are rising.

We heard the Prime Minister chastise the opposition last week for suggesting that the stimulus spending should be wound back. He said: ‘Should the coalition stop the stimulus spending, we would have to get up and tell the 5,000 schools whose projects haven’t started yet that they wouldn’t get them at all.’ Talk about hypocrisy—how quickly those opposite forget. Let me remind the Prime Minister that that is exactly what the Labor Party did when it took government in 2007. When it knocked off approved Regional Partnerships projects, it told community groups, local councils and sporting clubs in Canning and across Australia that they could not build their ovals, their halls and their gardens. We should not expect any more from the Prime Minister, whose government has been rife with backflips and hypocrisy to date.

Speaking with Canning residents as I move throughout the electorate, the issues that concern people most are common. They worry about debt and managing their mortgages. They are concerned about crime on the streets, they cannot access decent broadband and many have been disadvantaged by the changes to Centrelink rules. After more than two years in government, Mr Rudd has delivered nothing but symbolic gestures. The Prime Minister seduced the Australian public into voting for him and now they are starting to feel somewhat betrayed. Australians are really starting to ask themselves about what this man has promised and what he has really done for them. The answer is: not much at all. The government has held review after review on everything from groceries to whales. One billion dollars has been wasted on consultancy fees and $200 million was spent on the pink batts fiasco—you hear about them being hidden in bushes on the edge of highways rather than being put in houses. Millions of dollars was spent in transporting and accommodating Mr Rudd and his entourage of 60-odd to the failed Copenhagen summit. Thirty million dollars was thrown away on the first National Broadband Network plan and, after more than two years, not one new broadband service has been delivered. The reality is that the Labor Party’s plan is just impossible to deliver.

Labor has sunk this country into unprecedented levels of debt and continues to spend the borrowed money, largely from China. I understand something like $2 billion a month is borrowed from China. Is it any wonder it is from China? I understand from media reports the other day that the Chinese have something like $215 trillion in reserves, so they are the ones with cash. The government has lost control over Australia’s finances, spending, as someone else said in this place, like drunken sailors and losing track of the bill—or simply not caring.
Debt has exploded to $120 billion at this stage and, as I say, it is heading towards one-third of a trillion dollars if you listen to the forward estimates—a huge burden for future generations. History repeats itself. Labor governments simply cannot balance the books. It took us 10 years to pay off their last account and it will be a coalition government that puts this country back into surplus.

Aside from maxing out this nation’s credit card, what has Mr Rudd achieved this year? Well, he has written a children’s book! That is another fine example of his focus-group approach to leading this country. I understand he does not get out of bed in the morning until he gets the report from the focus group from the night before! For the master of spin the gloss is wearing off and the public are starting to look for substance. The Australian public elects leaders to make the tough decisions. Janet Albrechtsen was right on the mark when she commented:

... the old adage of no pain, no gain does not apply under Rudd. On the contrary, he relies on no pain, all gain: inflict no pain on voters to continue the political gain for Rudd.

She went on to say:

... the problem with Rudd’s rule is it means that he is fast becoming a Prime Minister who lacks the spine to make tough decisions ... Rudd risks leaving a legacy of having done as little as possible for as long as possible.

With an election in the wings, the unions will be out in force again, manning the booths and everything else that they do to look after their mates in this place. They are back in business. One is being investigated for attempting to impose no ticket, no start 1980s bullying tactics on building sites throughout Australia. In fact, you see what is happening in the Pilbara at the moment. The absolute star of the income of this country has now got demarcation disputes. They are picketing at the gates. There is a two-kilometre long queue of vehicles trying to get into their work site on the Pluto project. This is because they do not want to have moteling. What is ‘moteling’? It means you actually go into single-men’s quarters and when you have done your fly in, fly out term, somebody else comes in. If you think that is all very hard, I was a young teacher in the Pilbara back in the seventies. Can I tell you that I slept in those single-men’s quarters and I was happy to do so. Those were the people in the dongas that built the Pilbara that we know now. They are the people who helped the productivity of this country. But we have got the old union jack boots in charge. We saw Joe McDonald up there with Kevin Reynolds helping man the gates.

That is what this country has got to face under the Labor Party’s new workplace relations rules. We know that illegal strike action has risen under this Labor regime. Minister Gillard lacks the will and the way to get the unions under control. Around 1,500 illegally went on strike, as I said, at Pluto. We cannot be held to ransom over these sleeping arrangements. In fact, this is bizarre. I was in the north-west myself when 21 ships were ‘swinging on the pick’, as they call it, off Dampier, because they were not getting cream biscuits for morning tea. We cannot afford a repeat of Labor’s previous record. Between 1985 and 1996 the average days lost to strike was 44.4 working days per 1,000 employees. Under the coalition this got down to 2.3 days.

Delivering better roads, community facilities, schools and health services to Canning is a priority. It is great to see that many of the worthy projects that I have fought for are becoming a reality as we speak. The Port Bouvard Surf Sports and Lifesaving Club clubrooms are well...
underway and should be open in the next month or so. The Mandurah Entrance Road that the former state government refused to build—a Labor government, by the way—as part of the Forrest Highway is still under construction and will provide a much-needed direct link to Mandurah. The Pinjarra pool, which had $1 million worth of Regional Partnerships funding ripped away, is now under construction, albeit without any federal government investment and no hydrotherapy pool attached to it, as planned.

I will continue to fight for the train to Byford, the Pinjarra bypass and the Tonkin highway extension. We need to bring Mandurah’s bridges up to date, improve sewerage throughout the Peel region, and reopen a fully functioning intensive care unit—or, as it is called, high dependency unit—at the Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospital as a health priority. Almost 5,000 patients were transferred from this hospital between July 2007 and 2009—hundreds because they required higher level of care.

There is a state-of-the-art emergency department there but, because of the previous Labor government’s deliberate inaction, patients in need of high-level care are being shipped out of the door to places like Fremantle Hospital while 10 high-dependency beds gather dust in the Armadale hospital. These facilities are vital because all over Canning rapid growth is evident. It is underpinned by Western Australia’s strong economy, job opportunities and the prospect of a second mining boom. Local governments are under increasing financial pressure to keep up and they need the support and investment. With the population of, for example, Serpentine Jarrahdale Shire expected to double to almost 27,000 people by 2016, infrastructure needs to be put in place now to accommodate that almost seven per cent growth rate.

One of the crucial projects is the Tonkin Highway extension. More than 17,000 vehicles travel daily between Armadale and Byford on the South West Highway, and this number will continue to climb as developments in Byford, Hilbert and Wungong take shape. The highway extension, in conjunction with the train extension, which I will mention shortly, is needed to alleviate congestion to keep Byford streets safer. I have written to the transport minister, Simon O’Brien, in Western Australia urging the Barnett government to fast-track planning, costing and preliminary work for the extension and to allocate all-important funding. Ideally, it makes sense to extend the highway to Mundijong, but a viable alternative is to extend the Tonkin Highway from Thomas Road to the South West Highway via Orton Road, which would provide immediate relief for the Byford community.

The extension of the Armadale train to Byford is now long overdue. State Labor’s 2001 election platform promised the electrification of the passenger rail network from Armadale to Byford by 2008, but it was forgotten during the years that they spent in government. The train would provide commuters living in the Serpentine Jarrahdale Shire with public transport to work in Perth and students with transport options to schools in the outer metropolitan suburbs. While upgrades to the Australind tracks would be vital, much of the infrastructure is already in place to make this a reality.

Building new infrastructure and improving existing facilities in the south of Canning is time critical. Completion of the Forrest Highway has opened up the corridor for dramatic growth. The Shire of Murray alone is expecting to exceed their forecast of up to six per cent growth. Newmont’s Boddington goldmine, which opened last week, will employ around 1,000 people, with many moving their families to the region and putting pressure on Boddington’s township. All this means improving the existing road network and building bypasses to
keep the heavy-haulage vehicles out of the towns. In conjunction, this frequent and reliable public transport between regional centres throughout the Peel region is essential, particularly between Pinjarra and Mandurah.

Improving environmental outcomes remains important. Canning is home to world acclaimed and heritage listed wetlands and waterways, but the federal government’s funding cuts to the Peel-Harvey Catchment Council have affected environmental management of these waterways throughout the region. Combining this with essentially dismantling the Green Corps program is not a great look for a party that claims to have some care about the environment.

One of the other major concerns and barbecue stoppers in my electorate is one that the Rudd government simply chooses to ignore: the mounting number of asylum seekers arriving on almost a daily basis at Christmas Island. Just as soon as the government granted visas for some asylum seekers, there were more at the doorstep. There is a constant stream, so it is little wonder that the budget for offshore processing at Christmas Island has blown out by $130 million. Nearly 300 people arrived last week alone. Ten boats have arrived this year and there are no answers about where they are being housed. Australian people deserve to know whether the government intends to start bringing asylum seekers straight to the mainland. This is policy failure by the Rudd government.

My constituents want to know why the government has no objection to the fact that Centrelink benefits paid to refugees has increased by 40 per cent to an estimated $628 million under its watch. A strong migration system to deter illegal arrivals is the answer. Unless the government gets a grip on the shoreline, welfare payments will continue to skyrocket. In the last financial year, 52,469 refugee visa holders received Centrelink benefits, including the age pension, disability support pension, Austudy, Newstart and youth allowance, and more than $20 million was paid to refugees in, believe it or not, baby bonuses. All this while there are grandparents in my electorate who are raising their grandchildren without the government benefits that foster parents receive. There are war widows unable to access pensions and families with severely disabled children having their carer payments cut off.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention a small win in what has been a huge fight for many mum-and-dad franchisees in and around Australia, including in my electorate. As many of my colleagues know, for the last few years I have been representing aggrieved franchisees. A celebrated case involved Lenard’s, which is based in Brisbane but has franchises throughout Australia. Many who lost everything have decided to walk away from fighting the franchisors, hoping only for a chance to start again. Who can blame them?

One couple, Peter and Dianne Roguska, have been fighting their battle for nearly three years, eventually winding up in the Federal Magistrates Court. I was delighted to hear from the Roguskas last week with the good news that finally a verdict had been delivered in their favour from the courts. They have now relocated to the Kimberley for teaching positions after the furniture franchise, Woodstock, that they had bought failed after only 18 months. They had to fund the case themselves and go to court to get their successful outcome. They are to be congratulated for hanging on when it must have seemed futile and legal fees were mounting up. They are in the Kimberley teaching because they ran out of money and could no longer pay their legal bills. They have had to go to the outback and teach to get the funds to start again. They won this case with no help from the regulator, the ACCC. I only hope that
the changes to the franchising system that have been announced will bring about some real, not merely superficial, change for the franchising sector and hold rogue franchisors accountable.

I have listed many issues here that are very important to the constituents in my electorate generally. These are the issues that I have been, and will be, pursuing. I intend, with some vigour, to make sure that we deliver on them this year. I thank the chamber.

Mr BIDGOOD (Dawson) (6.02 pm)—I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. The Rudd Labor government is delivering for Dawson. That is the good news for the people of Dawson. The Rudd Labor government has delivered more in two years than the previous National Party member delivered in 11 years. In the past few years, working alongside fellow Queenslander Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Treasurer Wayne Swan, the federal government has secured more funding than ever before for our electorate. The electorate of Dawson has received record funding on such things as local community infrastructure, the Bruce Highway, health, schools and education. The Rudd Labor government is truly delivering for Dawson.

The Rudd Labor government have delivered $95 million over five years towards the southern port access road in my electorate in southern Townsville. Just last month I was with Minister Anthony Albanese and Queensland Minister for Main Roads Craig Wallace at the opening of stage 1 in my electorate. This road will take 500 trucks a day off of local roads in Stuart and Wulguru, with 960 direct and indirect jobs sustained over the life of the entire Townsville Port Access Road Project. More has been delivered on funding the Bruce Highway in the last two years than in the previous five years of the Howard government. That is what I call truly delivering for Dawson.

I am proud of the success of the Caring for our Country program. The Reef Rescue component of Caring for Our Country is comprised of five integrated components: water quality grants of $146 million over five years, which is good news for the people of Dawson; reef partnerships of $12 million over five years, which is another excellent factor delivering for Dawson; land and sea country Indigenous partnerships of $10 million over five years; reef water quality research and development of $10 million over five years; and water quality monitoring and reporting, including the publication of an annual Great Barrier Reef water quality report card, worth $22 million over five years—truly delivering for the people of Dawson. Farmers have benefited greatly from this direct assistance. It is assistance that the National Party could never deliver for farmers in Dawson. Our agriculture minister, Tony Burke, has seen first-hand the good work of farmers in my electorate of Dawson and I would like to put on record my thanks to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for the time he took early on in my term in government to come to the people of Ayr and the Burdekin and visit the sugar cane community there. The local people said that it was amazing that they had never had the minister for agriculture in the previous 11 years come to their town, their homes and their farms and see first-hand what their small community is doing in adding to the bottom line of this nation’s wealth. Even though the other side there mock it, cane is actually one of our chief exports—sugar is a major export—and the people of Dawson, in cane, mining, cattle and tourism, are adding to the bottom line of this nation, and we are doing it in spades.
Tony Burke, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, has seen the innovations and the investments in smart technologies that make the farmers’ farms more productive, and they protect the Great Barrier Reef. They have improved the health of the reef and the productivity of their farms. Today I had a call from the CEO of Mackay Sugar and he was absolutely ecstatic that today they are signing up a $120 million cogeneration project, which has been made possible by the decisions of this Rudd Labor government in raising the renewable energy target to 20 per cent from a measly two per cent by the previous coalition government. We have enabled Mackay Sugar to go online and today to sign for the start of that project. This is truly good news for the environment, good news for renewable energy and good news for adding value to the sugar industry in the seat of Dawson. The RET scheme, which will deliver a 20 per cent target for renewable sources by 2020, has allowed Mackay Sugar to start building this viable $120 million cogeneration plant at the Racecourse mill, because they have a guaranteed market for their electricity. For the information of the members here, they will produce enough renewable energy to supply Mackay with 33 per cent of its electricity needs, year in, year out. That is an excellent solution.

The Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change, Greg Combet, has seen this first-hand together with the Mackay Sugar chair, Eddie Westcott, and the board. This fantastic project has been on the drawing board—wait for it!—for 11 years. Eleven years of National Party representation failed to deliver in adding value to the sugar industry and failed to protect the environment by producing renewable energy and supplying Mackay with one-third of its electricity needs. But guess what? Within two years this Rudd Labor government has enabled Mackay Sugar to sign today the deal to commence work on a $120 million renewable energy project. I am truly proud to be part of this government that gets things done and truly does deliver for the people of Dawson.

We have also delivered on all of our election commitments in the seat of Dawson: $14 million for the Mining Technology Innovation Centre, the Australian centre for mining innovation, based in Mackay. Mackay is a service mining town to the Bowen Basin mining area. That is a fantastic achievement. Then there is $4 million for the Mackay Aquatic Park, which was often spoken about by the National Party former member but they never actually delivered the $4 million in any election. We did it.

We committed $50 million for the Bruce Highway upgrades in South Mackay and delivered, once again. We committed $25 million in funding for the Burdekin Bridge over four years. Something which I am particularly proud of—and again, the previous National Party federal member for Dawson went to two elections promising to fund a Mackay rugby league stadium and failed to deliver—we, the Rudd Labor government, have delivered $8.8 million for the Mackay rugby league multipurpose stadium. The people of Mackay and the seat of Dawson rejoice over that decision.

We also delivered $112,000 for the Dolphins’ soccer clubhouse and $1.3 million for sporting infrastructure for the Harrup Park Country Club. Also, we have a stimulus package, which the other side of politics voted totally against, which delivered to the people of Dawson 585 projects totalling $135,610,000, including $121,247,000 for every one of our 73 schools in over 277 projects. Then, of course, there is the Bluewater Trail in Mackay, worth $2.97 million—another great delivery to the people of Mackay and the people of Dawson. There have been moneys to councils for regional and local community infrastructure, $1.99 million; the
Better TAFE Facilities Program, four projects worth $2.63 million; the Mackay TAFE refurbishment, $2.645 million; shade structures over Mackay regional council parks, worth over $1 million; and $743,000 for Cannonvale and Bowen bike paths, including $518,000 to build a shared 4.5 kilometre pathway for the Bowen Front Beach to Sports Complex Cycle Link Project. Again, these were delivered by the Rudd Labor government.

We have delivered $225,000 towards the Cannonvale pedestrian bike path route project to link a major tourist resort and a residential area to the Whitsunday Shopping Centre; trade training centres: $3 million for Mackay Christian College, Carlisle Christian College and Whitsunday Anglican School; and $5.9 million towards the combined Mackay state high schools facility at Central Queensland University. This is truly delivering for the people of Dawson—delivering in areas in which the previous National Party representative did not deliver at all.

We have delivered funding for computers in schools—125 computers for Mercy College, 105 for Bowen State High School, 269 for Mackay State High School, 187 for St Patrick’s and 67 for Burdekin Catholic High School. And there is more, oh yes, there is a lot more being delivered. In Townsville I lobbied hard to deliver the funding for the Flinders Street Mall. That upgrade, with the Commonwealth’s contribution, is worth $16.2 million. And guess what? I lobbied hard with the Mayor of Townsville, Les Tyrell, to deliver $16.2 million. Why? Because the member for Herbert was absent, but the member for Dawson delivered for the people of Herbert and the people of central Townsville $16.2 million. Why? Because of an ineffectual Liberal Party member over there.

It is not just these commitments that have been delivered. The Rudd Labor government proves day in and day out the everyday real commitment and representation to the seat. We deliver. We have a clear agenda and a clear objective and we have the political will and determination to deliver, deliver, deliver for everyday working people.

Following the 2008 floods, along with all levels of government, we provided financial assistance, which was matched by state disaster relief, for the thousands of residents—8,000 homes in total were affected—of Mackay who were flooded out and lost everything. Thousands of homes and businesses were completely wiped out. The federal office of Dawson in Mackay was also flooded out, and we ended up having to move a year later, because it was simply unworkable. We ended up working out of my house for something like six months, because no other premises were available. Many, many businesses were affected.

So thousands of homes and businesses were wiped out due to the flooding, including my electoral office. Though we were flooded out, we did not stop. We needed to be there for our constituents in need. My staff and I operated the electoral office from my home for months. I want to put on record today the dedication of my staff. I want to name each one of them. There is the office manager, Jane Casey; at front reception, there is Adel Howland; there is my media manager, Andrea Pozza; there is my research assistant, James Sullivan; and there is our casual worker, John Pollitt. I want to say thank you to all of my electoral staff for their work through the most trying and harrowing of times.

I was elected in November 2007 and had no facilities to work from February 2008 until we got into new premises much later. They worked as a team. They came together and we did not stop serving the people of Dawson. We in the Labor Party are committed to helping working people, small businesses and community. I want to thank my staff from the bottom of my
heart. Through very hard and tough times, we kept on. That is the Labor way. We do not stop. We have a clear goal, we have a clear vision and we have clear work to do and we will never stop serving the everyday people of this nation. My staff have stuck with me from the very beginning. They are loyal. I want to thank them for what they helped me do even through the disruptions. I thank them very much.

As a united team, this government has delivered also. We have delivered extra funding for the Youth Information Resource Service, a service that provides help for young people in crisis and, particularly at a time when we had a spate of youth suicides, this government—through the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and through Jenny Macklin—provided an extra $200,000 emergency funding to help with that terrible situation. I thank them for that. We have provided extra funding for volunteer groups, veterans, pensioner groups and tourism ventures.

I am grateful to the cabinet for holding two community cabinets in my community, in Mackay in 2008 and in Townsville in 2009. I love community cabinets. It is grassroots democracy. It is speaking to the people. This is direct democracy and this direct democracy has ensured that stakeholder groups and constituents can be heard by the Commonwealth government.

Finally, I would like to say that the people of Dawson have for far too long been left out—hung out to dry—by an out of touch National Party. They are totally out of touch. It is an honour to serve the people of Dawson. I promise to work hard to continue to deliver for the people of Dawson. Whatever happens, I do not want to see the National Party take the seat of Dawson again. As you would know, I have announced that at the end of this term I will be stepping down for reasons of ill health. I promise that right up until then I will continue to give 110 per cent. I will not stop serving everyday ordinary people. I will not stop serving small businesses. It is an honour to do that. I can only say that the joy that I have seen on people’s faces has made it all worth while. I commend these bills to the House.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (6.18 pm)—What I will be speaking about today are issues relating to Defence, a department that basically has a litany of disasters associated with it. It is a department that, quite frankly, is in comprehensive need of reform. In fact, it is difficult to think of any major acquisition that is not in trouble. For instance, there is the issue of 12 submarines that is identified in the Defence white paper. That, quite frankly, is a joke. At the moment, we are having a great deal of difficulty in crewing even three of our six Collins class submarines. Indeed, we are having a great deal of difficulty with the maintenance of those submarines. The white paper has not even identified a capability gap requiring 12 submarines, and yet there it is: a huge expense for the future.

As a way of highlighting the problems within Defence, and particular of major defence acquisitions, I will be discussing the issues relating to the joint strike fighter or the new air combat capability. When you have a look at Defence claims—and indeed to outside claims—with regard to the capability, you see that Defence, far from being experts, have a history of very bad calls in terms of timelines and costs, never mind issues relating to capability. Only a few short months ago we had the head of the Defence Materiel Organisation, Dr Stephen Gumley, telling us that everything was okay with the program. It was all hunky-dory; he was certainly not losing any sleep! The fact is that very recently the United States Director of Operational Test and Evaluation was incredibly damning of the program. In that report they stated that
even with favourable test results from now on and with more test aircraft and more funding, initial operational tests and evaluation could—I repeat, ‘could’—be finished by 2016.

They stated that LRIP, or low-rate initial production capabilities, are not representative of the fully developed capability. The Director of Operational Test and Evaluation warned against using computer models before they are ready and have been demonstrated to accord with reality. I have to say that that reminds me of another area where computer models are used an awful lot—and that is on climate change. The F35C, which is the carrier-capable variant, through weight problems leading to increased landing and take-off speeds, is already over tyre-limit speeds. In other words, the speeds that are required of the aircraft are over what the tyres are rated for. That has led to various things being done in an attempt to reduce weight, which I will go into a little bit later.

They have had problems with software instability in the program. Thermal management is an issue. The aircraft is incredibly dense: it has a whole lot of avionics; a powerful radar for its size; and an engine that, of necessity for its thrust, runs very hot at its core. Therefore, they are having problems with cooling, particularly of the fuel. The fuel that they bring back is overheating and they are having problems with pumps and so on.

Also, the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation identified that the JSF is vulnerable to battle damage. In order to try to bring the weight down—particularly for both the F35C, the carrier variant, and the F35B, the marine short take-off and vertical landing variant—they removed fuel-safety check valves. In other words, if you have a problem and there is a fuel leak the fuel will continue to pump. They have removed fire extinguishers in certain areas and so on. Those are not good things for a combat aircraft.

In fact, the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation says that the aircraft is vulnerable to fire if hit, and battle damage to controls could cause the loss of aircraft and pilot. This is certainly not something we want to see for our people within Defence. This report of the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation is more at odds with the official schedules—here I am talking about the schedules of Lockheed Martin, the United States Air Force and our Defence department—than any program before. In fact, this program is so badly off the rails that US Secretary of Defense Gates fired the program manager within the United States Air Force. I have to say, Secretary Gates has been an incredible fan of this aircraft. He has been spruiking it as if he is a salesman for the project. It is only latterly that he has come to a realisation about the significant issues there are associated with the program.

The issue of costings is very interesting. In 2002 Colonel Dwyer Dennis, of the US JSF Program Office, said to Australian journalists, ‘It will cost about $37 million for the conventional take-off and landing aircraft, which is the air force variant,’ which is actually the variant we are getting.

At Senate estimates in 2003, then Air Commodore John Harvey said the cost would be US$40 million. At the Senate estimates hearing of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, in 2003-04 once again, then Air Commodore Harvey said, ‘It will cost US$45 million in 2002 dollars.’ Again at Senate estimates in 2006, Air Commodore Harvey said, ‘The average unit recurring fly-away cost of the JSF will be around US$48 million in 2002 dollars.’ In November 2006, again Air Commodore Harvey said, ‘The JSF price for Australia will be $55 million on average for our aircraft in 2006 dollars.’
In 2007, in a briefing to the office of the Minister for Defence—and I was at that meeting—Air Vice Marshal Harvey stated:

DMO is budgeting around $131 million in 2005 dollars as the unit procurement cost for the JSF.

That is very significantly different to the numbers that had been peddled before. Dr Steve Gumley, in October 2007, said:

There are 108 different cost figures for the JSF that I am working with and each of them is correct. Clearly, they are all wrong, given the way the numbers have been going. Despite what had been said at the meeting at which I was present where they referred to the unit procurement price as $131 million, Dr Steve Gumley, in July 2008, to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, said:

... I would be surprised if the JSF cost us any more than $75 million in 2008 dollars at an exchange rate of 0.92.

Then in September 2009 Dr Gumley confirmed previous advice—that is, $75 million in 2008 dollars, at an exchange rate of 0.92. Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defense, in February 2008, said the cost would be about $77 million per copy. In 2009, in the Australian Financial Review, I stated that costings were demonstrated by binding information provided to Norway that it would be between $165 million and $235 million per aircraft. Air Vice Marshal Harvey criticised my costing as being an Israeli ‘never to exceed’ pricing. He was very critical of what I said at the time. Now what do we find? We are purchasing aircraft at $229 million each. Admittedly, this will also be paying for certain infrastructure and so on associated with the new aircraft, but the estimate is that the unit procurement price is about $178 million each. We have seen a whole litany of wrong costings by defence. We have seen other costings done by me and other people which have been far closer to the mark.

I see very little due diligence. I have to admit to my chagrin that this was a decision that was initially made by the coalition government, but the current government has a lot to bear in this regard, with the honourable exception of the member who is sitting in the chair at the moment, the member for Brisbane. The fact is there has still been no coherent comparison of all contenders, and this is a travesty in a project which is going to cost tens of billions of dollars.

In terms of time lines, in 2006, then Air Commodore John Harvey stated that the first JSF would be delivered in 2012 and achieve an initial operating capability in 2014. In fact, they will be lucky to achieve an initial operating capability by 2018. On 23 February 2006, in a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade looking at new air combat capability, after Harvey had said that it would be 2012 for the first delivery, I said we would be unlikely to receive any JSFs in 2012. Consider who is right on that one.

There has been a lot of discussion about whether the JSF is good enough for us, whether it has all the capability we require when you look at the region. The fact is that, just in the last week, we have seen the shape of the future of our competition and that is an aircraft made by Sukhoi called the PAK-FA, which is the Russian aircraft that is made in direct competition to the F-22. Looking at the shape of the aircraft, in my view the stealth capacity is not up to the F-22, however it would be in the same ballpark as the JSF. But it has significantly greater capability, particularly in terms of aerodynamic performance and many of the sensors that it employs.
The concern is that the new air combat capability or the JSF, if we continue down this line, will be around in the time that my great-grandchildren are around. Do we really believe, particularly given that the PAK-FA has already flown and the Russians are looking at marketing it in the second half of this decade, that the JSF is going to cut it in this time frame, when my great-grandchildren are around?

On the issue of capability, Defence are betting on what are called stealth and network-centric warfare and they are also saying that, in terms of air combat, manoeuvrability and aerodynamic performance no longer matter because the missile will do the manoeuvring. Interestingly enough, a Rand Corporation report said of the Joint Strike Fighter, ‘can’t turn, can’t climb, can’t run.’

Let us have a look at some of the concerns about the Joint Strike Fighter. First of all, they talk about the issue of stealth. There are problems with the aircraft in terms of its stealth capability. It is very compromised and it is focused on what is known as the X-band or a certain range of frequencies of radar in the frontal sector. The problem that is the Russians are already developing longer wavelength radar for fitment to aircraft and they will be able to be back-fitted to aircraft like the legacy Flankers and also PAK-FA. Another problem is that the Joint Strike Fighter does not have good stealth even within the X-band from either the side or rear quarters. They are also betting on network-centric warfare, which is basically getting a whole lot of information that is not directly available to your aircraft and its own sensors—in other words, it is sharing of information.

The point is, in terms of concept this is really nothing new; it has been around since the days of sail. If you have your fleet here and the enemy fleet there and you cannot directly observe them as you have a frigate in between, semaphoring the disposition of the enemy fleet is a form of network-centric warfare. Another problem with network-centric warfare is that it necessitates that you transmit information. As soon as you transmit you are detectable; people can detect you all emissions, so that it is a very significant concern as far as the stealth of these aircraft is concerned.

Let us have a look at the issue stealth. What happens in an engagement? The Joint Strike Fighter holds its missiles in an internal weapons bay. As soon as it wants to shoot it has to open the weapons bay doors, which means that you can detect the aircraft very easily with radar and target it. In addition to that, the Russians have infrared search and track detectors, and the European pirate infrared search and track has similar capability. Head-on it is able to detect aircraft at 50 kilometres, from the tail at 90 kilometres and an AMRAAM launch—advanced medium-range air-to-air missile—at 100 kilometres. So it is far from ‘You will not know that you have a problem until the missile actually hits you up the backside’, as Defence are fond of saying.

In terms of the missile doing the turning, the problem is that missiles do not tend to work as advertised. Let us go back through a bit of history here. The AIM-7 Sparrow missile, which was used by the Americans in Vietnam, had a probability of kill of 0.7 in tests. That means that 70 times out of 100 the missile killed its target. It went to Vietnam, and that went down to eight times out of 100. The Vietnam era AIM-9 Sidewinder, once again, in tests got 65 out of 100; in reality, 15 out of 100. The AIM-9 ‘Lima’ got very good results in the Falklands of 73 out of 100. By the time of Desert Storm, they had worked out how to combat these things, and it was down to 23 out of 100. AMRAAM, the missile that we have, at the moment has a dem-
onstrated capacity of 46 out of 100. It sounds good, but that is against fleeing non-
manoeuvring targets that are not using electronic countermeasures and do not have beyond-
visual-range missiles themselves. This is all a very significant concern for us. Defence are
telling us that beyond visual range is what it is all about; we are never going to have within
visual range again. So why does something like the F22 have a gun?

Let us have a look: how can we improve the situation with Defence? In my view, the first
thing that we can do is look at decoupling the funding of DSTO from Defence. DSTO must
have the capability to act and conduct research in a completely independent manner while still
doing the work required to support defence projects. The DSTO leadership must not be in a
subservient position to Defence leadership. There should be completely separate chains of
command reporting to the Minister for Defence. There should also be DSTO and Australian
National Audit Office personnel integrated with all defence acquisitions and project upgrades.
The Defence Materiel Organisation will probably need to be dragged kicking and screaming
into this, as they will resist these measures and use arguments stating that they will not be to
operate efficiently while hamstrung by these personnel conducting oversight. They will also
say that there should only be this sort of oversight when a project gets into trouble. That is
nonsense. Oversight is required to prevent trouble from occurring.

In terms of a legislated approach to reform, perhaps we should have something like an Aus-
tralian version of the Goldwater-Nichols act that was introduced in the United States in 1986
under Reagan, which did a considerable amount to improve the issues relating to US capabil-
ity in both acquisitions and upgrades. The policy must be put in place to allow robust debate
within Defence and at all levels on capability issues. There must be no censure of Defence
personnel who question capability, doctrine, ideology or the way things are done. Defence
must engage with its critics in the Australian community and address concerns with actions,
not disparaging rhetoric. We see an organisation such as Air Power Australia, which has been
criticised ad nauseam by Defence, and yet it has a far more accurate record in its estimates of
price, time lines and so on than Defence has. Fixing Defence is critical to Australia’s future,
and I urge the government to carry out comprehensive reform in this regard. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AR Bevis)—It being nearly 6.40 pm, I interrupt the de-
bate in accordance with standing order 192. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the
debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mr Don Murphy

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (6.39 pm)—Tonight I want to pay tribute to Don Murphy, a very
special man from my electorate. Don died on 29 January 2010 at the age of 67 after a two-
year battle with cancer, which I understand he fought courageously right to the end. Don was
a restaurateur. He was the welcoming face at Woodchoppers Inn, at Mudgeeraba. Indeed, he
was a great bloke, well known by everyone in the Mudgeeraba community. He was often re-
ferrred to as ‘the mayor of Mudgeeraba’ or ‘the silver fox’—he had a great head of silver hair.

He was certainly a very generous and warm human being, he was kind and considerate and
he hosted some wonderful events at Woodchoppers Inn. In fact, his New Year’s Eve parties
were legendary; I have attended a couple myself. Don was passionate about local business. He
was an active member of the Mudgeeraba Chamber of Commerce and he promoted
Mudgeeraba at every opportunity. He certainly was a true ambassador for Mudgeeraba. He also supported local events and charities. He was always there when we needed a helping hand.

To Don’s family I want to extend my sincere sympathies tonight: his wife, Gina; his children, Alison, Luke and Victoria; Andre, Sean and Sarah, to whom he was father-in-law; and his grandchildren, Sam, Max, Charlie and Ellis. To all those people, all his relatives and friends, our sincere sympathies, and may Don rest in peace and be forever remembered as the smiling and welcoming face of Mudgeeraba. *(Time expired)*

**Dr Patricia Giles AM**

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.40 pm)—I wish tonight to speak about an incredible Australian woman, former Senator Pat Giles, whose contribution to public life was acknowledged in the Australia Day honours list last month when she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia for services to the community, in particular her dedication to promoting the rights and interests of women.

Pat Giles was a qualified nurse when she founded the Women’s Electoral Lobby in Perth in 1973. From 1981 she served as a Labor senator for Western Australia for 12 years, during which time she was a strong advocate for issues related to women, including women’s rights in the workplace; women’s representation in parliament and within the trade union movement; health and education services for women and girls; and support for single mothers.

Pat Giles led the Australian government’s delegation to meetings of the United Nations Decade for Women, culminating in the end-of-decade conference in Nairobi in 1985, which was a turning point in the way that the United Nations and in turn member states recognised women in official statistics. After 1985 women became visible, with statistics such as their health, labour output and literacy levels now recorded alongside those of men.

Following her retirement from the Senate, Pat continued to be active in women’s rights, both here in Australia and internationally, serving three terms as the President of the International Alliance of Women. Pat Giles has always been a tireless campaigner for women and she is a dear friend who has always been supportive of me while I have worked for the United Nations and in my current role. I congratulate Pat on being appointed as a member of the Order of Australia.

**Canning Electorate: Pinjarra Pool**

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (6.42 pm)—Last week a collective sigh of relief went through Pinjarra. The long-awaited Pinjarra pool finally got underway after 17 years of planning. Residents have suffered through another steamy, hot Western Australian summer, so the turning of the sod on the Pinjarra pool marked a new beginning. Its commencement is a testament to the commitment of the Shire of Murray to delivering this long-sought-after and needed pool.

There is only one problem. Without any federal government investment the planned hydrotherapy pool has had to be sidelined. The Barnett government, Alcoa and industry partners have made up the $5 million needed to get the 25-metre pool underway, but because the shire’s application under the federal community infrastructure program was knocked off and because approved Regional Partnerships funding which I fought for was cruelly withdrawn, the project is underfunded.
The Pinjarra community deserves rehabilitation options. I have written to both the state and federal ministers for disabilities and health urging them to find the money for the hydrotherapy pool option. It is a small price for huge health benefits. The support of the warm water provides pain relief and improves mobility for those suffering arthritis and joint pain and for those who have undergone surgery after suffering trauma. Can a shire with a growth rate of six per cent afford to go without such services?

Without rehabilitation services in Pinjarra residents are forced to travel to regional centres or Perth for therapy. The community eagerly anticipates the delivering of all the facilities in 2011. It would be disappointing to see the upgrade only almost finished.

Lindsay Electorate: Australia Day

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (6.43 pm)—I rise to acknowledge the Penrith City Australia Day award recipients for 2010: Aaron Nielsen, Rodney Jacka, Allan Bond and Gabrielle Moran. This year’s Young Citizen of the Year award went to 11-year-old Aaron Nielsen of Claremont Meadows. I met Aaron last year as he was embarking on a 65-kilometre walk from Penrith to Bondi to raise money for the Starlight Children’s Foundation. Aaron, who spent some time in Westmead Children’s Hospital in 2007, knows first-hand how the Starlight Children’s Foundation can make a stay in hospital for a sick child a little easier. He was able to raise $4,500 thousand to help support their work.

Rodney Jacka was the winner of a community award. Mr Jacka has been a tireless volunteer with St Vincent de Paul over the last 20 years. Despite having contracted lymphoma 10 years ago, Mr Jacka has continued to serve his community with passion and dedication.

Allan Bond was a community award recipient and, with his wife, Bev, has been running dance lessons for the past 10 years to raise funds to restore to community ownership the 109-year-old St David’s Church at Llandilo.

Community award recipient Gabrielle Moran is the Vice-President of the Nepean-Blue Mountains Prostate Cancer Support Group. Mrs Moran is an important part of the network of people that provide friendship and guidance to men and their families suffering from prostate cancer.

I congratulate each of the winners of these awards. Our community is richer for the contribution they have made, and continue to make, and I join with the entire City of Penrith in saying thank you.

Cowan Electorate: Wanneroo Little Athletics Club

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (6.45 pm)—I previously spoke of the value that little athletics provides to young people in the electorate of Cowan. I have a great regard for the parents who volunteer so strongly to keep the clubs going. I am particularly grateful to those who go beyond helping out, taking leadership roles in coaching and administering those clubs.

I recently visited a training session of the Wanneroo Little Athletics Club at the invitation of Tim Blake, one of the fathers and senior trainer at the club. The club trains at the Edgar Griffin Reserve in Wanneroo. I describe the facilities as barely adequate, although they make the most of what they have brilliantly. Clearly, an oval without marked lanes makes it more difficult for the athletes to train and prepare for their competitions. Similarly, the reserve is not easy to get to and does require parents to drop the children off. It is for those reasons that I support the move by the Wanneroo Little Athletics Club to move to the Wanneroo show-
grounds and their move to have lanes marked for five to six months of the year. Not only will this be good for the local children who wish to participate in little athletics but also it will provide the conditions to establish a senior athletics club in the district of Wanneroo.

It should also be remembered that the Wanneroo Show held the Wanneroo Gift races in November last year at the 100th anniversary show. The Wanneroo Agricultural Society wants the Wanneroo Gift to continue in 2010. However, what is now required is for decent and even grass lanes to be marked. Athletics WA will need the showground marked in lanes before agreeing to the event in 2010. Together with the benefits for junior and senior athletics, the marking of the showground into lanes allows for the training of athletes and provides great collateral benefits. *(Time expired)*

**Blair Electorate: Somerset Regional Council**

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (6.46 pm)—Last week I outlined for the people of the Somerset regional area the BER funding of $20.8 million. The Somerset Regional Council area has been added to the federal seat of Blair in the recent redistribution in Queensland. Tonight I am going to talk very briefly about the partnership that the Rudd Labor government is having with the Somerset Regional Council, delivering nearly $2.47 million to the Somerset Regional Council for the fundamental needs of local communities, building local amenities, creating local jobs and improving local lifestyles. Mayor Graeme Lehmann has described the funding in the partnership as absolutely fantastic, and this includes the Esk fitness trail construction, the Esk skate park construction, the Fernvale Campdraft Park amenities block—all of which have been opened. I was pleased to see on Australia Day the skate competition at the skate park. Also, $2.1 million is being put in by the Rudd Labor government for the Fernvale Indoor Sports Centre. Construction will start this year and I am looking forward to working with the people at Somerset to deliver vital community infrastructure under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program.

**Schools**

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (6.48 pm)—I rise to raise my concerns in relation to the government’s much hyped My School website. This government seems to think the answer to every problem is a new website. We have had Fuelwatch, Grocery Choice and now My School. Two out of three have already been disbanded and, hopefully, My School will be overhauled or it should also end up in the cyberspace garbage bin.

I am not opposed to transparency. I am certainly not opposed to providing parents with accurate information on the performances of schools, but I fear that My School will cause more trouble than it is worth. To begin with, it is a simplistic measure of a school’s performance to report the result of the NAPLAN tests and, in doing so, it is tempting parents to reach some conclusions about the respective worth of schools in their region. I fear that publishing these results in this manner will cause unnecessary stress and uncertainty for students, parents and teachers. At the very least, it has the potential to erode confidence and self-esteem of young people attending schools which perform below the national benchmarks. The inevitable ranking of schools will lead to parents making an assessment of a school and making decisions on the merit of sending their child to a particular school without a full and accurate account of the school’s true worth. There is much more to education than the results of a numeracy and literacy test, as important as these measures are. We have already heard that Victorian schools
are being urged to ‘teach the test’ and it is only a matter of time until valued programs like music and physical education are diminished in the curriculum.

The My School website carries a message from the Chair of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority claiming the website allows the national tests to be understood in a ‘fair and meaningful way’. With all due respect to Professor Barry McGaw, what a load of rubbish. The website should carry a flashing red sign warning parents to handle with care or treat these results with caution. The great irony in all this is that now we have the government claiming it will be able to allocate resources on a needs basis. (Time expired)

Member for Robertson

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (6.49 pm)—Belinda Neal is an intelligent, capable woman who actively represents her electorate and has many friends in this House. I appeal to the fair members of the press gallery not to join in what appears to be a shark attack on Belinda Neal. This attack in my view is being led by the Telegraph newspaper with its misleading headline by its columnist Glenn Milne yesterday, ‘Up yours Kevin …’ These words were never uttered by Ms Neal and are very far from her attitudes and public performance. They are words designed to negatively affect innocent preselectors in a preselection that is taking place this week.

I remind this House and the people of Australia that this report comes from a person involved in a violent, drunken attack on another journalist on national television. No-one is denying people the ability to show forgiveness, but I just ask that forgiveness and attitudes towards people be shown in a consistent and non-hypocritical way. It is a bit rich—in the old Australian vernacular—to see this kind of attack on Belinda Neal, who is performing her duties in her seat and in parliament, coming from a person with that kind of background. It is understandable that Mr Cassidy and other people have put Glenn Milne back on the Insiders and are treating him as if this thing did not happen; I just wish the same kind of standards were applied to members of parliament, including Belinda Neal.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (6.51 pm)—It is difficult to follow that, although I am not sure I disagree given the column in today’s Australian from Mr Milne. I rise to again speak in this place on the Murray-Darling Basin and the mismanagement or lack of progress being made by the Rudd Labor government in fixing the biggest environmental crisis facing the nation. The Rudd government came to power with much promise and hype in 2007. They said they were going to take charge of this crisis in the Murray-Darling Basin. They were going to get the states to agree with their Labor cousins at the federal level. However, what we have seen is a complete failure to get a national agreement, which is one of the first steps needed to get some genuine reform on the Murray-Darling Basin.

We are seeing examples of this failure already. There was some decent rainfall in the northern part of the basin which led to large flows into the Menindee Lakes. But, unfortunately, because of the lack of control and the failure of the Labor government on this issue, those waters are now caught up in the Menindee Lakes and are not flowing down to South Australia and into the Lower Lakes where environmental flows are needed so desperately. It really is an indication of the failure of this government and the failure of the Rann government. Fortunately in about a month’s time we will have an opportunity to get rid of the Rann government.
and get a real reformist government when it comes to water in South Australia, and we look forward to that opportunity.

**Clermont Kindergarten and Day Care Centre**

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (6.52 pm)—On the weekend I was privileged to attend the opening celebrations to mark the expansion of the Clermont Kindergarten and Day Care Centre. The new pre-prep building and playground increases the number of places at the Clermont kindy and day care centre by 24 places. There are now 75 places at the centre—a remarkable achievement in a small rural community, even one with a heart as big as Clermont’s. The expanded and improved centre can now provide its quality services to even more families, opening up employment opportunities for parents and educational opportunities for children. The expansion project is the result of a successful partnership between the federal, state and local governments as well as Rio Tinto, who together made available the much-needed funds. The credit, however, belongs to the past and present staff, families and committee members of the centre who wrote the submissions, chased the support and managed the project.

All of us who attended the community celebration on Saturday had the feeling that we were part of something very special. Much of the sense of occasion was due to the role in the official opening of Mr Satoru Murai. As a former executive managing director of Blair Athol Mine’s Japanese joint venture partner J-Power, Mr Murai has been a friend of the centre since its beginnings 26 years ago and made the long trip from Japan to perform the opening on Saturday. I congratulate everyone involved in this fantastic project. The children and families of Clermont are lucky to be in a town that places so much value on the care and education available to its youngest citizens.

**Mr Barry ‘Doc’ McKenzie**

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (6.54 pm)—Last Monday my home town of Lakes Entrance lost a local legend with the passing of Barry ‘Doc’ McKenzie. I would like to pay my respects to a great father, a great friend, a great community member and a truly great Australian who will be sadly missed by his family and friends. Doc made an extraordinary contribution to Lakes Entrance and the broader Gippsland region as a volunteer for sporting organisations, a community leader and a strong advocate for sustainable management of the Gippsland Lakes fishery. A man like Doc is impossible to replace, but we can all learn from the example he set for us in volunteering his time to a number of community organisations.

As a founding member of the surf lifesaving club at Lakes Entrance, Doc worked hard to encourage younger people in particular to achieve their absolute best. He was very proud of the young people who had worked their way through the nippers program to surf patrols to become valued members of our community. As a fisherman and practical environmentalist, Doc had a wealth of information about the lake system and was widely respected in the scientific community for his knowledge. Doc had a rare mix of common sense, determination and dedication to the future of our community, along with the ability to mix with people from all walks of life. He will be sadly missed. *(Time expired)*

Mr Bevis—Order! In accordance with standing order 192A the time for members’ statements has concluded.
Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Briggs:

That the House:

(1) notes that:
(a) archives are an important source of primary information for researchers, school students and the general public; and
(b) the South Australian National Archives Office provides South Australians with access to valuable and relevant Australian Government records, including but not limited to important information on migrant arrivals and residencies, government decisions and actions, High Court judgements and prominent people such as Governors-General and Prime Ministers;
(2) recognises that records, especially of the Australian Government, should be available in each State and Territory to ensure all Australians have reasonable access to these important documents; and
(3) calls on the Special Minister of State to reverse the decision to close the South Australian National Archives Office to ensure South Australians continue to have readily available access to national archive collections in South Australia.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (6.55 pm)—I should perhaps have extended the motion to include the Hobart, Tasmania office. They too are finding themselves with the sword across their neck as we stand here today. It is a purely bureaucratic decision made by bean counters without a genuine appreciation for the important cultural heritage value that the archives has in states like South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania. I note that the member for Lyne is speaking on this motion, and I am sure he too will express great disappointment with the decision to shut the Hobart office of the National Archives.

I would like to quote a leading authority on the importance of cultural history in Australia. This is from 5 April 2001 when there was some talk at the time amongst finance bureaucrats under the former government, as I am sure you would remember, Mr Deputy Speaker Bevis, who were looking for savings across the public service. The member for Griffith stood up on this issue and made speeches to both this place and the House of Representatives on the shutting down of the National Archives office in Brisbane. In fact, I think it was something as simple as moving the archives office from a part of his electorate to another electorate in the Brisbane CBD—which I think is probably the deputy speaker’s electorate. He spoke very well, saying that he was deeply concerned that closing this repository would:

… become a pretext for a rapid culling and rationalisation—

of the NAA’s records. He went on to say:

… who knows what documents may be destroyed as a consequence?

I agree fully with the now Prime Minister but then member for Griffith’s view about that—that it is very important that we maintain these offices in Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart. These are very important offices for local communities. As we all understand, archives offices today represent important opportunities not only for research academics but also for the general public. They are of particular interest to those researching family histories and the cultural history of their state, particularly in relation to migrant information. Of course, they have had great importance to the stolen generations and I noted with interest some significant comments by those who represent the stolen generations about these bureaucratic penny-pinching decisions to shut down the offices in Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart.
The one city that does not get mentioned in that is, of course, Brisbane. It appears that Brisbane has survived any culling of its office at this point for reasons best known, I guess, to the bureaucrats involved. But they do play a very important role in the cultural fabric of our society. The Adelaide office is destined to close, unless the government changes its mind on this decision, on 31 March 2011. The decision was taken in November as part of the mid-year economic review and clearly it was a decision made by penny-pinching bureaucrats who were looking for ways to save money due to the excessive spending of the Rudd government.

They have all had to cut down their spending. They have all been told they have to find savings. The National Archives is no exception to that. We know that is the case with the Australian War Memorial as well—they have had to sell advertising for the last post as part of the budget-saving measures, the efficiency dividends, that have been put across the Public Service. This is another one of those penny-pinching episodes of a government desperate to find money in any hollow log they possibly can. Unfortunately, this hollow log means that the Adelaide, Hobart and Darwin offices of the National Archives will be shut, which I think is a very unfortunate decision, which is why I think that those on both sides of the House will support this motion.

The Archives have been open for over one hundred years and they have played a very large role in the way our cultural history has developed. They store vital information. Interestingly, on one side of my family there is a fellow member of parliament, a state parliamentarian, the Hon. Bob Such. He is related to me through a strange mixing of cousins. He is a third cousin, I think.

Mr Adams—Sounds like Tasmania.

Mr BRIGGS—Well, it is Adelaide. It turns out that the Hon. Bob Such has a link to the Hoods—my nanna was a Hood by birth. He compiled a family history in conjunction with my uncle, Barry Sharman from Mildura, a few years ago. It is a comprehensive history; it goes back to the 1860s, when the Hoods arrived from the UK. They settled in Gumeracha in South Australia, which is now in my electorate. They were the first pioneers who went up to Mildura—with the Chaffey brothers.

Mr Adams—They’re all Labor, aren’t they?

Mr BRIGGS—No, I don’t think Gumeracha has ever been Labor. Gumeracha, of course, was Tom Playford’s seat, Member for Lyons. He was the longest serving Premier in the country’s history.

This information was obtained through things like the archives. Both Barry Sharman and Bob Such were able to get information and research they could not possibly get if these archives were shut and moved to a central location in Canberra, Sydney or Melbourne. It is very eastern-states focused, but that is typical when you have Canberra based bureaucrats who are just penny-pinching, looking for any hollow log to make up for the shortfalls that unfortunately the Treasurer has foisted upon these departments with the massive spending spree that he has been on. This is an example of decisions made by the government at national level now affecting communities at the lower level.

There has been a great outcry in Adelaide and South Australia about this decision. It has caused a great deal of resentment, because again it seems that cities like Melbourne and Sydney—and in particular in this case Brisbane—escape the cuts. I remind the House that in 2001
the member for Griffith, the now Prime Minister, spoke very passionately in this place about the need to keep the archives office open in his electorate. It seems a little strange that the government has decided to shut down the archives in Adelaide, Hobart and Darwin but Brisbane has survived. So we are disappointed with this decision and thus I have moved this motion. I am very pleased that the member for Grey has decided to speak in favour of this motion as well. He has obviously had very similar feedback in his electorate in South Australia about the impact this decision will have. I will be interested in the contribution of the member for Lyons; I am sure he will be disappointed with the decision as far as Hobart goes as well. I am sure people in Darwin have had a similar reaction.

We should not forget that archives are a very important part of the cultural fabric of our country. If we do not study our history, we risk forgetting it. One of the great things Australians do is honour the past. We do that through war-time records. We honour people who served our country with great monuments around the country as well. These archives contain information about people’s service, they contain information about migrant records and they have a great deal of the state’s and city’s history contained in them. If you simply up and move them to an eastern state on the basis of bureaucratic penny-pinching—just because they are a hollow log from where the government can steal back money to pay some of the massive debt that this country has built up—then that is a disaster for smaller states like South Australia, like Tasmania and like the Northern Territory. We hope very much that the public outrage, which is clear in South Australia at the moment, is enough to force the Rudd government to reconsider this decision. I know that the Labor members from South Australia are privately disappointed. I hope they are able to bring the same passion to this debate as the member for Griffith did in 2001.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (7.05 pm)—The honourable member for Mayo has brought forward this motion, and I thank the member for bringing this topic to light because Tasmania is also on the list for closure and that is why I sought to speak on this matter. The member mentions in his motion that ‘archives are important sources of primary information for all researchers, school students and the general public’, and that is always true. In his motion he mentioned the Special Minister of State, whose role as Cabinet Secretary is the important role that he has in relation to archives.

I do not know how much people know about or understand our Archives, but the Commonwealth Archives keep all the documents that relate to the birth of our nation as they have been collected over the years in each state. That is the central repository of Australian Commonwealth government records: it documents the full range of Australian government activities since Federation in 1901. My family goes back a long way too, and a lot of those historical records are there before 1901 and include significant 19th century records dealing with activities that were transferred from the colonies to the Commonwealth. It includes mainly 20th century records created by the federal government since Federation in 1901. We also hold 19th century records that were transferred from the colonies after Federation—for example, records about defence, Customs, patents, lighthouses, naturalisation, shipping and postal and telegraphic services in those early days.

At the moment in Tasmania it includes documents such as railway records, the Australian Antarctic Division, the CSIRO, lighthouse logs, immigration papers, and weather and tidal records among many other things. You will now also be aware that on 2 November the Aus-
Australian government, as part of the mid-year economic and fiscal outlook—the MYEFO—statement, announced that the National Archives, along with other government agencies, were required to find significant budget savings for the current forward estimates years 2009-10 to 2012-13. The savings were $700,000 in the first year and $1.4 million in each year thereafter.

In order to make savings of this order and to meet current commitments and to move to being a 21st century organisation that can meet future demands, it was thought that there was a need to make fundamental changes to the way the Archives operate. To achieve this as well as reduce service costs in Canberra, a decision was made that the state offices in Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart would be closed over the next 2½ years as the buildings’ leases expired.

While I understand the need to make changes, I believe closure should be the option of last resort and that the importance of being able to keep federal documents in their states of origin is beyond just money. Many historians around Tasmania have signed a petition by the Australian Society of Archivists to save the Archives.

I have already written to the Special Minister of State and Cabinet Secretary, Senator Ludwig, to argue the case for the retention of the Tasmanian records in Tasmania. I think the discussion should be based not necessarily on the closure of the federal archives but on whether the Tasmanian collection could be handed over to the state to be included in their collection and to be henceforth managed by the state. I believe the staff looking after the current archives should be transferred too, as they have the experience with the collection that is presently there.

My argument is that Tasmania is beginning to develop a whole new line of research on convict history and early colonial development that requires deeper access to the nation’s archives. I had hoped to use the National Archives as one of the major sources of information for visitors to actually find sourced data in Tasmania. Our state archives are well used and are a direct link, and maybe sharing people and resources might allow for a better economic outcome for the National Archives.

I understand that in the past there has not been a great use of the material there, but in light of these new developments it would make a lot of sense to keep these records in Tasmania. If there was a need to amalgamate some of the resources, could they not be centralised in Tasmania? We have the expertise of researchers there. The University of Tasmania is working on a more community based approach to history development and there are a number of products being developed through all these resources to allow the tourist industry to make use of Tasmania’s rich and varied history, especially a very detailed maritime picture in keeping with the island heritage of our state.

I believe the Tasmanian state government is already negotiating to have the transfer of ownership of the railway records from the Commonwealth to the state. Many of these continue to be used today to resolve day to day engineering problems in Tasmania and it would be really stupid to take them elsewhere. It would be good to see other similar documents, such as those relating to defence, customs, patents, lighthouses, naturalisation, shipping, postal and telegraphic services retained because there is still ongoing use. To my mind, rather than shift all the documents around, it would make sense to integrate it with the local archives and develop an online link between the state and the Commonwealth to ensure that the information is easily available. Many of the documents are very delicate and would need some considerable care to move and store them at this stage. That is a cost that would be additional to the
current costs. I believe there is a compromise would save costs but still keep federal archive material in the relevant states.

I would like to thank the honourable member for Mayo for bringing this matter forward. I have had some representations about it, but the honourable member should also realise—I think penny-pinching was the term he used—that the Howard government, as he would no doubt be aware, transferred considerable amounts of the holdings of the Adelaide archive office to Sydney. They basically gutted the Adelaide archive office and moved most of the material to Sydney during his party’s time in government. I understand that there are no plans to close the Brisbane office, which he indicated might be a possibility. From my research, I understand that there is no government policy in that direction at all. So I think the honourable member was using the motion to also play politics and try to make some political points, which is very unusual for the member for Mayo. He is such a straight shooter in many regards.

The archives are so important to us—for example, in relation to lighthouses. Tasmania has a lot of lighthouses. One of my staff grew up in lighthouses, as her father was a lighthouse keeper. So those records have great significance to many, many Tasmanians. This recording of our cultural history will allow us to create tourist products that are based on the proper history from our archives. If we can find a way of keeping this information in Tasmania, it would be great.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (7.15 pm)—It gives me great pleasure to support this excellent private members’ motion from the member for Mayo. I welcome the support also from the member for Lyne and I suspect also the member for Makin.

Mr Adams—Lyons.

Mr RAMSEY—Yes. I support this motion that recognises the importance of the national archives and their value to the community, and asks that the Special Minister of State reverse the decision to close the South Australian National Archives Office. This attack on the archives is a further example, if any is needed, that this Rudd Labor government is totally eastern seaboard focused. In fact, the plan to relocate the records to Sydney and Brisbane surely is a sick joke. What is the point of preserving history if you are going to park it where, for all intents and purposes, no-one can access it? Sometimes you will hear people joke about how well schools run in the weeks when there are no children there. We all remember the episode of Yes, Minister which featured a hospital with no patients because it ran much more efficiently. It would seem that the bean counters in this case that the member for Mayo has identified have realised just how much more efficient this service would be if no-one accessed it. Sure, the department would save money because the numbers of South Australians—and Tasmanians and Northern Territorians, for they too are affected by the decision—accessing the service would drop.

Residents of South Australia are sick of being treated as second-class citizens. I have been contacted by a number of constituents in the last few weeks who are appalled by the closure of the office—from Kadina, Georgetown, Jamestown, Lock, Yacka and Yongala. The nearest constituent in my electorate of Grey is more than an hour’s travel by car from Adelaide and the furthest is 15 hours. Clearly, just getting to Adelaide is an enormous impost for many; travelling to Brisbane would be ridiculous.
Just what are the records held in these offices that the government is so keen to relocate to Brisbane and Sydney? The offices in Adelaide contain immigration records dating back to 1848, just 12 years after the establishment of the colony. There are records for almost all families who immigrated to the state prior to 1980. Not only is this a treasure-trove for family historians; it also assists on many occasions to provide relevant information for Centrelink applications and passports. There are records pertaining to our Indigenous population and employment records, and pension numbers that are vital for those of the stolen generation who are trying to reconnect with their families. How appalling to see that the government is preening itself on its apology to the stolen generation while it strips away access to research tools for the affected people to try to reconnect their families.

The national archives contain other diverse records which for individual groups are of great importance—records of the British atomic tests at Maralinga, invaluable for the servicemen and their families who were stationed there at the time; rafts of information about buildings and defence fortifications; records from the two world wars; and records from the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody—which, incidentally, were promised would remain in Adelaide. Family historians throughout South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory are appalled by this.

It is common for researchers to be senior Australians; after all, retirement is a period of their lives when they have time to concentrate on those questions and look through records of family history that were so difficult to access during their working lives. By their very nature, this group does not find it easy to travel interstate and for those who live in my electorate and face the challenge of getting to Adelaide—let alone even contemplating how they would get to Sydney or Brisbane—relocation will severely limit access to one of their most valuable resources. Electronic searches are regarded as second-best, expensive and often incomplete. This work by its very nature requires poring over the records.

This penny-pinching assault on the national archives is an almost inevitable result of Labor’s profligacy since the last election. There has been an explosion of debt since the election. They have been intransigent on considering the possibility of winding back their stimulus spending, even as they claim we are through the worst of the economic challenges. This ill-considered move plans to save $3 million to underwrite a $150 billion debt.

I bring to the attention of the House a speech, which the member for Mayo also cited, given in this place in 2001 by the member for Griffith, now the Prime Minister. He condemned the moves not to close the Brisbane and Adelaide offices of the national authority, but to relocate them within their own cities. He asserted that the movement of a few kilometres would threaten the integrity of the collection. He questioned what would become of the staff and he suggested the anticipated savings were not real. I suggest the Special Minister of State contact the Prime Minister for support in reversing this appalling decision.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (7.20 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion moved by the member for Mayo in respect of the National Archives office in Adelaide. I note that other speakers have also referred to the closure of offices in other capital cities. In recent months I, too, have been contacted by many people concerned about the impending closure of the Adelaide office of the National Archives. As a result of those representations, I have in turn written to the Special Minister of State, the Hon Joe Ludwig, raising my concerns about
the closure and the concerns that were raised with me by those people who contacted my office.

The Adelaide office is expected to close on 31 March 2011 when the current lease on its premises expires. The office employs six staff and I am advised that, in the year 2008-09, there were 720 visits to the Adelaide reading room. I am also advised that those six staff will be assisted in their transition to other forms of employment within the public service. Those 720 visits compare with 22,290 visits nationally. I am also advised that the Adelaide office holds 0.9 per cent of National Archives of Australia’s total record holdings and I understand that, overwhelmingly, public access to National Archives’ services is from online users. In 2008-09, 1.9 million records were accessed online compared to 57,000 records accessed in all National Archives of Australia offices around the country.

Importantly, I am advised that the closure of the Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart offices will not adversely affect the storage of records and no archives will be destroyed as part of these changes. Neither will the office closures change existing access arrangements for records relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The closures will not affect the government’s undertakings to assist individuals in their search for information about themselves, their families and their country. The National Archives holds many records that contain information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their history, as other members have previously said. These records are held in National Archives repositories around the country.

In response to the recommendations of the *Bringing them home* report, the National Archives created an index of names of Aboriginal people who appear in archive records known to contain information about Aboriginal people. As determined in consultation with Aboriginal communities in South Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria, the index can only be accessed on behalf of Aboriginal people by National Archives reference staff or by Link-Up staff with password protected access. There is currently no direct client access to the index in National Archives offices and access requests are managed by the office holding the records. Copies of relevant information are then sent to the applicant free of charge. National Archives officers will continue to provide this service to Aboriginal Australians, regardless of the location of their records.

Having outlined the facts relating to the Adelaide office, I nevertheless urge the minister to consider the matters raised by those people and organisations who have raised concerns about the closure of the office with me. Not all people have access to, or are fluent in the use of, online services. Furthermore, National Archives staff provide invaluable guidance with research. Again, that is simply not available in a personal way with online research.

I take a moment to refer briefly to some of the representations I have received on this issue. Associate Professor Susan Schech wrote to me on behalf of all researchers and staff of the Migration and Refugee Research Cluster at Flinders University. The cluster is a leader in research into Australia’s migration history and the ability to personally access the National Archives office contributes to the work they do. The researchers at Flinders University feel that their work would be made more difficult, more expensive and less productive by the closure of the Adelaide office. Individuals and genealogists researching family trees find it much easier to do so if they able to attend the National Archives office at Adelaide in person.
I have also been contacted by several local historians and researchers, as I understand have many other federal parliamentary colleagues from South Australia. These researchers, most of them volunteers, attend the Adelaide office of the National Archives in the course of their work researching the history of their local communities or their own families. It is my view that the importance of a service should be measured not simply by the number of users of the service but rather by the contribution the service makes to the broader community. In that regard, I believe the Adelaide office of the National Archives provides an important service which should not be lost to the people of Adelaide.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr MJ Washer)—The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Haiti

Debate resumed, on motion by Ms Parke:

That the House:

(1) expresses its:

(a) deep sympathy for the people of Haiti following the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck on 12 January 2010 causing terrible devastation, including large-scale loss of life and injury; destruction of homes, buildings and infrastructure; and widespread hunger, thirst, homelessness and lack of security;

(b) deep sympathy for the United Nations as this disaster has caused the greatest loss of life of United Nations staff members in the organisation’s history; and

(c) strong appreciation for the critical work of the United Nations in Haiti, which it continues to perform under extremely difficult circumstances;

(2) strongly supports the actions of the Government in providing funding in the amount of $10 million for immediate emergency relief in Haiti, and $5 million for reconstruction, as well as technical assistance in the relief and reconstruction effort;

(3) urges the Government to consider the provision of further funding and assistance towards the reconstruction effort over the months and years ahead;

(4) notes its appreciation of the contribution of many United Nations’ member states and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to the aid effort in Haiti; and

(5) recognises and welcomes the generous and compassionate contributions made by many Australians, and by Australian-based NGOs and charities to the relief efforts in Haiti.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (7.25 pm)—At 4.53 pm on 12 January, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, inflicting an almost unparalleled natural disaster upon a nation that is among the least equipped to deal with the consequences. Upwards of 150,000 people have been confirmed as dead; 200,000 people are injured, many severely; more than one million people are displaced; and there has been massive destruction of infrastructure. Haiti’s Prime Minister, Jean-Max Bellerive, says the current emergency may last 12 months, while the reconstruction could take up to 10 years.

The urgent need for a well-resourced, comprehensive and coordinated response to the earthquake has been complicated by a number of factors, not least in the case of the UN and NGOs by the toll taken on aid personnel and facilities in Haiti. The headquarters building of the UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSTAH, completely collapsed, killing almost 100 staff,
including the head and deputy head of the mission and those officials responsible for emergency and disaster management.

Of course, the terrible magnifier of this disaster is that even before the quake Haiti was the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Two-thirds of Haiti’s population were living below the poverty line, 58 per cent of the population were undernourished and a quarter of Haiti’s children under five were moderately or severely underweight. Half of Haiti’s children did not attend school and there was no effective public sewage system. Much of Haiti is eroded and barren as a result of deforestation, and this undermines subsistence farming efforts, drives up food prices and leaves the country vulnerable to natural disasters. Senior UN official John Bevan has commented in an article entitled ‘Poverty kills people, not nature’, that in 2004 5,000 people died because of two heavy rain showers. Why? Because people are so poor that they cannot afford even the deforested land and ‘build their shacks in the places nobody owns, mainly in dry river valleys which have flash floods once a year’.

The Australian government and many Australians have donated generously towards the appeals for Haiti, to UN agencies like UNICEF as well as the many NGOs doing fantastic work on the ground. Yet it is possible for us to contribute more. While Haiti and its long-suffering people may seem remote to Australians, its history offers a lesson for us all on the historical and structural causes of poverty. Haiti is a former French slave colony that achieved independence in 1804 through a slave revolution but continued to suffer through a series of dictatorships and from foreign intervention and economic exploitation. An example of the latter was France’s demand, supported by embargoes against Haiti by England and the US, for compensation of 90 million francs for lost property—such ‘property’ including the slaves themselves—as the price for recognising Haiti’s independence in 1825. These demands crippled the young country for more than a century as it struggled to pay off high-interest loans taken out to pay France. Haiti used to be self-sufficient in the production of rice, but in the 1980s the IMF insisted Haiti abolish its import tariffs and the dumping of rice surpluses from developed countries followed, thereby destroying Haiti’s rural economy and driving people out of agriculture to shanty towns in the capital.

Further commentary on Haiti’s suffering through outside intervention is contained in an article published on newmatilda.com titled ‘Haiti’s 200-year earthquake’. John Bevan also writes:

We can only defend ourselves from the forces of nature if we have some financial resources.

… … … … …

It’s hard not to see these deaths as calculated sacrifices to an imposed and brutal economic model … As the dust settles on the dead and dying in Port-au-Prince, let’s give a thought to the next batch of paupers who will be killed not by nature, which makes no class distinction, but by their poverty which leaves them vulnerable to even the most predictable downpour.

In the context of Australia’s response to the Haiti disaster, many people in the community were appalled by Senator Joyce’s suggestion last week that the opposition will consider cutting Australia’s international aid budget. He has since tried to justify his comments by claiming that Australia should not borrow funds only to send them overseas. Is he not aware that our recent moderate borrowing was made in the cause of underpinning the Australian domestic economy? If he is concerned about sending funds overseas, does he also propose that we cut the defence procurement budget on that basis? International development and global secu-
rity are two sides of the same coin and Australia cannot afford an opposition, let alone an alter-
native government, that makes reckless statements on such important matters.

In the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake the international community has an opportunity to
assist in the longer term a country of former slaves that was given little chance from the be-
ginning. It can contribute generously to the reconstruction effort, including the redevelopment
of Haiti’s agricultural sector; it can and should consider forgiving Haiti’s existing foreign
debt; and it can support democracy in Haiti free of outside interference.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (7.30 pm)—It is with some sadness that I offer my comments to-
day on the tragedy that has befallen Haiti. There is no doubt that it is very hard for us in this
country to appreciate the depth of suffering that can result in these places when they are sub-
ject to natural disasters of the magnitude that occurred on 12 January this year. Nevertheless, I
would like to talk a little about what has occurred in Haiti. I begin by saying that the nation
and the people of Haiti have my deepest condolences for the tragedy that they have suffered.

Of course, in the history of Haiti, this is not the first time by any means that an earthquake
has afflicted that nation. I understand that in 1751 all but one masonry-built house fell in an
earthquake in Port-au-Prince. In 1770, 1842 and 1946 there were major quakes—the one in
1946 had a magnitude of eight on the Richter scale; it brought Haiti down and did great dam-
age to Port-au-Prince. That part of the world also suffers from the major storms that can occur
seasonally there. So Haiti has been no stranger to sadness and adversity over that time.

On 12 January at 4.53 pm the latest earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.0 on the Richter
scale, resulted in great destruction, particularly in Port-au-Prince but also in other parts
around the city area. Somewhere between 170,000 and 200,000 people are reported to have
been killed in that tragedy, with 300,000 injured and over a million homeless. Again, it is very
hard for us here, in such a stable country in all regards, to appreciate what has befallen the
people of Haiti. Furthermore, 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings have been
destroyed. The place has been decimated. The capital is a wreck.

I think it is important to examine this. Some of this might have been avoided. I am not say-
ing that an earthquake measuring seven on the Richter scale will leave everything standing
even if construction codes are excellent, but the reality is that there apparently are no con-
struction codes in Haiti and the standards of construction are extremely low. Houses were
built on slopes with insufficient steel within the foundations. This was a tragedy and a disaster
exacerbated by a history of maladministration. I think that that is also a tragedy. As part of the
reconstruction effort—I know a lot of countries have committed a lot of money to this and
obviously we applaud what the federal government has put in, the $10 million up front and $5
million for further reconstruction later—there should certainly be a very strong look at putting
in place the good governance and standards that are required to try and mitigate the damage
that will be caused in future tragedies so that this does not need to happen again on this scale.
I think those are things that we need to take away from this.

In the short time I have remaining I would like to talk about what the people of Haiti are
facing now. The women and children are extremely vulnerable. Of course, women and chil-
dren have never had a fair go in Haiti. Apparently, rape was made a crime on the statute books
only in 2005—more evidence of what needs to be done. They need to put in place a proper
administration and restore a working democracy to make sure that children and women are
protected in that country. I thank the Lord that America has responded quickly, as have a
number of countries, to make sure that there are soldiers on the ground trying to protect the weak and the vulnerable. It is a tragedy. The country has my condolence, but I look for a much brighter future.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (7.35 pm)—I welcome and commend the motion of sympathy moved by my colleague the member for Fremantle regarding the devastating earthquake in Haiti and the further expression of condolence for the significant loss of life of staff from the United Nations itself. The United Nations, along with aid agencies, are undertaking critical work in providing support for the Haitian people, while the Australian government has contributed significant funding both for emergency relief and for reconstruction.

The Haitian health minister, Alex Larsen, has emphasised the dire situation of homelessness in the aftermath of the quake that could be well be exacerbated this month when heavy rains are due. This could trigger a public health disaster unless quake refugees are given adequate shelter. The United Nations have warned that, if heavy rains arrive—perhaps as early as mid-February—while as many as a million Haitians are still homeless, it could provoke a public health catastrophe, spreading disease through dense, insanitary, makeshift encampments.

An estimated 500,000 people are living in nearly 500 makeshift tent cities, often in shelters made from whatever they can salvage, and in terrible conditions. An initial EU assessment found that more than 4,000 physical structures were destroyed or damaged in the capital, Port-au-Prince. The Haitian health minister said it was necessary to ensure better sanitation in the camps to prevent the emergence of communicable diseases, saying such a development was ‘the biggest concern for the government of Haiti’. ‘I believe the biggest problem right now is people sleeping in the street,’ Mr Larsen said.

With so many homeless people, aid groups have been unable to get enough tents to all of them. This is an immediate concern, as the lack of tents leave people vulnerable to the elements. Many fear that they could still be without shelter during the upcoming rainy season. Haiti’s president, Rene Preval, called on foreign donors in late January to send 200,000 tents to house families left homeless before rainfall scuttles relief plans. Both Haitian and international officials are also concerned that the camps that do exist may become permanent if a long-term solution to homelessness is not found. Discussions are in train for contracting private companies to build apartment complexes and homes to accommodate residents currently living in tents, as part of a greater reconstruction effort.

It is essential that Haiti is given an opportunity to rebuild anew in ways that allow this impoverished nation, which has experienced enormous hardship, both politically and from natural disasters, to have a brighter future. The international community has a critical role to play in ensuring that Haiti does not descend into despair, and addressing homelessness and economic disadvantage is an important place to start.

I concur with Oxfam’s five priorities for Haitian reconstruction, which include cancellation of Haiti’s outstanding US$890 million international debt; support for Haitian farmers and small business; ensuring poor areas benefit from cash grants to speed economic recovery; support for civil society and the Haitian government; and building earthquake-proof buildings and using alternative fuel sources to reduce deforestation. I also believe, as Oxfam has indicated, that donors, the UN and the Haitian government must work together to ensure that poorer areas that were amongst the hardest hit by the earthquake benefit fully from recon-
I think it is important that donors heed the warning of Oxfam Australia’s Policy Director, John Ensor, that:

Haiti is a divided and highly unequal society so there is a real risk that ... politically influential and richer Haitians will secure reconstruction resources at the expense of Port-au-Prince’s poorest.

I wish to add two further points which are of significance in looking beyond this immediate tragedy and the relief effort. The first is that rapid global population growth is giving rise to massive urbanised slums which are highly vulnerable to disasters of all kinds: natural disasters, climate disasters and political conflict. A billion people, one-sixth of the world’s population, live in slums. The slums of Latin America, Africa and Asia are places of insecurity and violence. If we do not try to stabilise the world’s population, the scale, human tragedy and misery of disasters like that in Haiti will inevitably continue to rise.

Secondly, I believe Australia needs to lift its overseas aid. I am pleased at the steps the Australian government is taking to lift our contribution to 0.5 per cent of gross national income, but I would like to see us go further and meet the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income. We cannot look upon the faces of those innocent men, women and children in Haiti and see such suffering and hardship and not want to open our hearts and do all that we can to help them.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (7.40 pm)—I too join with colleagues in supporting the motion of the member for Fremantle. Might I offer my condolences, because I am well aware that she has suffered grief for friends, acquaintances and former work colleagues in the United Nations. The death toll of United Nations workers has reached a staggering 93, as I am informed as recently as today. Then you add to that the sheer size of the toll amongst Haitians themselves.

Having attended commemorative functions for Black Saturday in the town of Horsham in my electorate over the weekend, which had a very bad fire, I was reminded that people are well aware of the impact of tragedy. Australians are not strangers to that, but the sheer size of the death toll in Haiti is staggering. I also recall the deep shock of Cyclone Tracey; I was a young engineer at the time. I commend the effort that came out of that disaster, which basically destroyed a whole city. The Australian building industry was overturned, with proper standards being set for cyclone design for buildings.

In a period of grief we need to talk realistically about offering to help Haiti and nations like Haiti—who lack the GDP—to pay for proper building design. It is a tragedy that UN staffers were killed at work in a multistorey building clearly not designed to cope with earthquakes. Earthquake design is no mystery today. It happens right across California and Japan and other earthquake-prone regions of the world. People say that it must cost an enormous amount. No, it does not. The added cost of earthquake design is as small as 1.5 per cent. It is about understanding what an earthquake does. It is not an up-and-down motion but a horizontal motion. It is about building flexibility into a building so that it can move with the horrendous horizontal shift that occurs during earthquakes. You can do that with steel but you cannot necessarily do it with concrete. I understand the building that housed the United Nations staff in Haiti was concrete. We need to do as other members have said—send some engineers over there who know about earthquake design—and help them recover. For a small island state in the middle of the Caribbean, in an area where the Californian and Caribbean plates join, I would recommend that they stay away from multistorey building. That would be my advice.
Similarly, Black Saturday is going to spur us on to be much more conscious about how we manage our forests in the future. Motions like that which the member for Fremantle moved here today spur us on to put on the public record our determination to provide assistance.

There are not a large number of Haitians in Australia but I have discovered one family in a town in Robinvale. They are still waiting on news of loved ones; they have brothers and sisters who have still not been recovered and they do not know where they are. That is a terrible position for families to be put in when the situation was perfectly avoidable.

The death toll is up to 220,000, with 300,000 injured. Imagine the strain that has put on the health system. There have been more than 4,000 amputations. Mr Deputy Speaker Washer, in your professional role you would understand the nature of the crush injury that causes the ultimate amputation of a limb. Haiti desperately needs our help and assistance. It is a great tragedy that just as Haiti was starting to rise above the challenges and political difficulties that it has had over the years this disaster happened. The death and injury toll in Haiti, with a population of less than 10 million, is going to set them back horrendously.

We as a nation need to join with the United States and other countries to help these people recover, and I would like to be part of that. I commend the member for Wills for his comments, which I strenuously support. Australians need to understand that we are the lucky country and that there are other countries around the world that do not enjoy our level of prosperity. I think it is perfectly appropriate that we share the benefit we have with those around the world who are less fortunate than us.

Mr KERR (Denison) (7.45 pm)—This parliament has been called on on a number of occasions—to too many occasions in the past 20 years—to consider motions that have spoken of tragedy in other countries. Those who have served for a long time in this parliament will recall the concern we expressed to the victims of the tsunamis that happened in our own region, to the victims of the Pakistan earthquakes and to a number of other events where the frailty of humans against the scale and magnitude of events caused by earthquakes, tsunami or fire have devastated us.

I think it is fair to say that few, if any, of those circumstances, and certainly any that I can recall in my 23 years as a member of parliament, have amounted to a toll of 220,000-plus in such a small, poor and tragic part of the world. Of course, this is not our backyard and some might say, ‘Why does the compassion of the Australian parliament reach out to people in an area of the world where other and more mighty countries have primary responsibility?’ I accept that basic proposition, but I accept it only this far. As citizens of a globe, we have some significant responsibility, firstly, to express our personal sorrow for the losses and, secondly, as a nation to make a contribution as a fellow nation state to the work of the relief organisations and to the rebuilding of that society. We have already made quite substantial contributions to the initial emergency phase. I am certain the member for Fremantle will continue to press for a continuing and ongoing commitment by the Australian government both by way of financial contribution and advice and constructive input into the best way to ensure that the lives of those who have survived can be reconstructed in a way which permits them to have some chance of a fairer and better future.

This is an enormous tragedy, and I thank very much the member for Mallee for referring to the personal loss that the member for Fremantle has experienced. Four of her close friends with whom she worked at the United Nations lost their lives in the disaster that befell the UN.
The UN has difficult roles to play in this world and nothing more tragically illustrates that cost that is sometimes imposed on its personnel than that fact. I am certain that the member for Fremantle, when she composes herself sufficiently to refer directly to those four people that she knew so well, will make her own contribution in that regard.

Finally, I am delighted that this motion that has been put forward has received the bipartisan support of members from all sides. That reflects broadly my experience of this parliament when it is confronted by these kinds of large tragedies that affect the global community. I echo the hope of the member for Wills that we are able to make a common defence of ongoing significant contributions to overseas development assistance, particularly as it is sometimes contested by those within our community. It is something that we all share a responsibility of advocating.

I thank the member for Fremantle for raising this matter in this parliament. I know it has been the subject of comment by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. I am certain that the good wishes that are being expressed today and the advocacy that is occurring behind the scenes by members on all sides in encouraging our Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance to focus on ongoing reconstruction will be attended to with goodwill and with the support of all sides of this parliament.

I thank all members who have participated in this debate. We are always put on the spot when we speak on these kinds of things. It is hard to find words that effectively capture an event of such immensity. To speak on something that caused the loss of some 200,000 lives—nearly half the population of my state of Tasmania, let alone those injured and left behind homeless, fatherless and motherless—is something that is truthfully beyond me. I do my limited best to express my concern.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (7.50 pm)—I join with other members who have spoken already on the motion put forward by the member for Fremantle on the tragic earthquake which occurred in Haiti on 12 January. I am sure many of us as members of parliament were having a well-earned break with our family and friends in the summer holiday period at the time. Sitting at home and seeing the images broadcast into our lounge rooms, I do not think anyone could not have been moved to tears, particularly those in Victoria who experienced the Black Saturday bushfires recently. But the sheer scale of this disaster really put our lives into perspective at a very difficult time. I take great pleasure in being here on behalf of the people of Gippsland to express our sympathy and sorrow and to express our support to the people of Haiti at this terrible time.

Haiti’s president, Rene Preval, was reported in the media on 28 January as saying that nearly 170,000 bodies had been counted. Today, listening to other members’ contributions, I have heard different figures. The different figures just stun me. It is another level of dysfunction in an already impoverished nation, but coming to grips with the actual numbers is impossible for us as members of parliament here in Australia when you think that 170,000 is the population of Ballarat and Bendigo combined. If we reflect on the Black Saturday bushfires again, 173 people died in that disaster and it was the worst natural disaster in Australia’s history. So for us here in Australia to try to comprehend the level of destruction in Haiti is extremely difficult. We must also reflect that a wealthy nation like Australia was far better placed to deal with the tragedy that befell us only 12 months ago in terms of infrastructure,
resources and assistance in place to cope with what confronted us as a natural disaster. I know we debate our health system a lot in this place but in comparison to the support that is available to the people of Haiti at this terrible time I think we have very little to complain about. But I trust no-one will hold that against me in future debates when we discuss all the issues in Gippsland!

I express my deepest sympathy to the people of Haiti and recognise the ongoing issues of homelessness, security and certainly what may be a decade of rebuilding. I also note—and other members have as well—that the motion refers to the United Nations and the greatest loss of life that the organisation has faced in its history. Our thoughts are with the families and friends and very much so with the member for Fremantle, who carries herself with a great deal of dignity and has the respect of both sides of the House. Our thoughts are with her at this time.

Even amidst this enormous tragedy there have been some remarkable stories of survival. Fifteen days after the earthquake the rescuers retrieved a 16-year-old Haitian girl out of the rubble of the college of St Gerard in Port-au-Prince. The young lady’s name was Darlene Etienne and she was described as weak but happy. What lies ahead for Darlene and her compatriots is something that I think we need to reflect on more here in Australia, and the level of support that our government can provide. The uncertainty that faces the nation of Haiti and young Darlene is something that concerns me deeply and I know it concerns others on both sides of the House. The federal government has donated $10 million, which was supported in a bipartisan manner. That was the immediate relief but also there was $5 million for reconstruction. I certainly personally support that aid.

I do take some exception to the member for Fremantle’s reflections on Senator Joyce’s remarks at the Press Club. I was there on the day and the media coverage and the government’s key messages do not sit exactly with my recollection of Barnaby Joyce’s comments on that day. They were reflective rather than prescriptive remarks, indicating that there were hard decisions to be made to balance the nation’s books in the future in terms of debt. So I do not believe it was quite as cut and dried as the government’s key lines seem to be reflecting in their attacks on Senator Joyce at the moment. I am not aware of any change in the aspirational policy of the opposition regarding the foreign aid budget. The Minister for Finance and Deregulation himself has repeatedly indicated that everything will be up for review in the future in terms of paying back our debt. Having said that, I do not want to diminish at all the spirit of this occasion in our parliament’s reflections on behalf of our communities and I certainly support the need to provide government assistance to the people of Haiti.

I also want to reflect on the fact that Australians are very generous people and that they do not always just depend on government aid to flow through to express their support. There is a lot of direct support coming through from Australian people right around the world. They recognise opportunities to make contributions themselves at a person-to-person level rather than relying on the government-to-government level. There have been many direct donations, I know, from people within the broader Australian community. I take up the previous member’s comments regarding it not being in our backyard but, as global citizens, we do have a responsibility to help wherever we can. Australians have shown their generous spirit on many occasions in the past and I am sure will continue to show that spirit in the future. I thank the House.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Kimberley: Heritage Listing

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Haase:

That the House:

(1) recognises that:

(a) the proposal to heritage list 17 million hectares of the Kimberley will deter mining companies from investing in the region, further disadvantage all local communities and seriously damage the future of mining in Australia;

(b) those involved in mineral exploration and mining projects, particularly in Western Australia, are subject to an already burdensome approvals process;

(c) adding more red tape by applying National Heritage status to such a vast area would be the breaking point for many companies who would consider moving their investments to other locations;

(d) an ill defined approach suggests a lack of research and understanding of heritage listings; and

(e) the indiscriminate listing fails to recognise the contributions that others such as miners and pastoralists make to the economic viability and heritage of regional areas;

(2) ensures that the Government commits to meaningful consultation across a broad section of the community; and

(3) condemns:

(a) the blanket listing of this vast area of the Kimberley; and

(b) the additional restrictions placed on pastoralists and miners.

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (7.56 pm)—I rise this evening to speak to the motion in my name and I do so with great justification. I would remind members of this place that Australia is a relatively recently European populated nation on this planet. We have done a great deal as a nation during our 200-plus years in this place, but more and more it would seem that there is a philosophy beginning to emerge today that would lock up this nation. It would stop development. It would cease the very enterprises that have made this nation a great place. Most recently, over the quiet media Christmas-New Year break, Ningaloo Reef and some terrestrial environs were, firstly, declared national heritage. Then, secondly, a declaration was made that they would be listed for World Heritage. This was done, almost, by sleight of hand—not quite in the dark of the night, but almost—and I believe that the motivation for this action is rather difficult to determine. I strongly suspect, however, that these declarations are made and these propositions put forward by people with scant regard for the continued development of mankind as a species. I suspect that they are far more concerned with getting their own name and personal short-term endeavours up into the media spotlight, because I cannot for the life of me reconcile the idea of locking up productive resources and natural environments of Australia with a declaration that they have the interests of Australians at heart.

I am all for protecting the environment. But I am all for protecting the environment for the human species. I am all for making this planet a better place for humans to live. I am not at this stage interested in abdicating my part in that endeavour to cockroaches or *Rattus rattus*. Maybe other people’s objectives are to simply vacate this nation and leave it to the natural
environment, and I am sure that will be a wonderful attribute to make as Australians to the
global economy. Perhaps not; perhaps more we should be inclined to consider that we need to
sustain the natural environment with humankind as part of it. I like to think of humankind as
being at the top of the food chain rather than, as I see others being more concerned with, at
the bottom.

The Kimberley region of Western Australia is vast, and much of it is still almost wilder-
ness. I say ‘almost’ because there is a thriving pastoral industry which exists in the Kimberley
region of Western Australia. However, it is proposed that much of that active pastoral re-
region—which is providing employment for Australians and export dollars for the benefit of
Australians—be listed for National Heritage, as a forerunner to World Heritage listing. Seven-
teen million hectares—that is a huge tract of country, rich in resources, rich in diamonds and
rich in nickel. It is a vast area for agriculture and horticultural development. And, as I have
said, it exists as a great resource for the pastoral industry—for the export of livestock to hun-
gry mouths overseas. Those hungry mouths, I am sure, are not quite as concerned as some
here in Australia are with locking up as wilderness that Kimberly region. Rob Gillam, Presi-
dent of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia, has made a couple of
comments about the idea. He said:

... a National Listing precedes a World Heritage Listing, which virtually ensures that a region is locked
away from future development, and that existing industries are severely curtailed.

He is referring of course to the pastoral industry. He went on to say:

If you wanted to preserve the vast riches of the Kimberly for peoples other than Australians into the
future, this would be the best way to do it.

He said:

The Minister is either totally naive, or he has been instructed by his friends in the conservation move-
ment to use National and World Heritage listings to deny any development benefits to both the Aborigi-
nal and broader communities of the Kimberley region.

AMEC, the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, say: ‘Heritage list the Kim-
berley, and lose mining.’ Darren Brown of AMEC said:

Adding more red tape by applying National Heritage status to such a vast area would be the last straw
for many companies who would consider moving their investments to other jurisdictions.

Traditional Owner Advisory Group member Mr McCarthy said, ‘We are simply throwing a
blanket over the whole of the Kimberley.’

We cannot afford to simply let this sleight of hand go on. The people of the Kimberley, es-
pecially the Indigenous population of the Kimberley, deserve a future. A future with income,
genuine training, jobs and self-esteem, a future that includes making a contribution to the
Australian economy, will only come with development.

The Northern Development Taskforce has reported today that the Kimberley ought to be
providing more employment—a little sleight of hand about how much employment by pastor-
alism, agriculture and horticulture—but they say the Kimberley population needs employ-
ment. They allude to the fact that tourism will be the great salvation for Indigenous population
in the undeveloped Kimberley. Think for a moment of the underdeveloped population and
wilderness of Sumatra or Africa—there are some wonderful tourist destinations in Africa.
There are still some wonderful trips to be had into the darkest centres of Borneo. And of
course, there is our own Papua New Guinea. Look at those wonderfully exotic destinations and the icons they present for global tourism and then think of the standard of living of the locals. Think how close Sumatra is to the population of Europe. And think how its standard of living has gone through the roof as a result of global tourism because it is a wilderness area. Not a lot. Not a very high standard of living. But many whose philosophy would tie up the Kimberley would dictate that that is the future for our Indigenous population—taking pennies from tourists, the occasional job as a guide. What sort of a future is that?

Compare that with a future, an absolute future equal to any that we enjoy as members of a real workforce. Compare that with resource development—export dollars for Australians to maintain the standard of living that we enjoy today. Compare it with the pastoral industry developing fodder crops for cattle that can be mustered during the wet, close to bitumen roads for export to feed the world. Think of the real dollars, the real jobs and the real opportunities that would come and imagine the much better future the Indigenous population of the Kimberley would enjoy if we continued to develop the Kimberley in a sustainable way—subjected to modern regulation and enjoying modern technology—rather than, as has been suggested here, simply locking it up for the future and converting it back to wilderness.

No-one involved in this proposition suggests who is going to manage the country. Right now, pastoralists are the only affordable land managers we have. More importantly, they are the only reliable, affordable land managers we have. That ought to be kept in mind, because the government agency that will be responsible for managing a World Heritage listed area in the Kimberley will be the Department of Environment and Conservation in Western Australia, which is already so poorly resourced that they cannot manage the country already under their control. Other members in this debate will raise the issue of what happens to the pastoral country when it is vacated. I simply say again that this area of the Kimberley must remain sustainable and productive and not be tied up as wilderness. (Time expired)

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (8.06 pm)—I am not too sure whether to tackle the member for Kalgoorlie for jumping the gun with his motion, given the process that is actually underway in the Kimberley—and I will address that in a moment—or accuse him of being well over a decade too late, given that he has been the member for Kalgoorlie, including the area of the Kimberley, for some time and it has taken until the election of the Rudd Labor government for some serious and cooperative planning, including development, to be undertaken in conjunction with the Western Australia government. So, as I say, I am not too sure whether you are jumping the gun or you are a decade or more too late.

I might say that I think the member for Kalgoorlie and I would agree that the Kimberley is a very special place. As one who has been fortunate to visit the Kimberley on many an occasion, I do have a great sympathy with the notion of protecting and heritage listing many parts of the Kimberley. I am also a realist, though. I grew up in the bush and I believe in the opportunities for regional development and employment for those who live in rural and remote areas of Western Australia.

There are two particular processes that I want to address today, one involving the West Kimberley, which I think is the genesis of some of the member for Kalgoorlie’s concern. Secondly, I want to talk about developments in the East Kimberley.

There was an agreement reached with the Western Australian government some two years ago, where the then state Labor government and the Rudd government agreed that the two
governments working together would embark upon a strategic assessment of the West Kimberley, including, under the EPBC Act, a common user liquefied natural gas precinct to service the Browse Basin reserves.

Part of that agreement included an assessment of the cultural and environmental values of the West Kimberley and formal identification of its national and potential international heritage values. In other words, there is a joint process being undertaken. I am concerned that the member for Kalgoorlie’s motion appears to be predicated on a lack of understanding about what that process involves and the very rigorous and proper consultation process that is now underway. Indeed, the Australian Heritage Council’s assessment is required to include extensive consultation with landowners, occupiers and the Indigenous people with rights and interests, and they make recommendations to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts on possible national heritage values and the potential boundaries and protection required for those national heritage values.

As I understand it, Minister Garrett has asked the council to provide him with their advice by 30 June 2010. So I want to assure the member for Kalgoorlie that there is a rigorous consultative process underway. The member for Kalgoorlie, and those he advocates on behalf of tonight, have ample opportunity to have input into that process, and I urge them and encourage them to do so as part of those recommendations concerning the West Kimberley going to Minister Garrett by 30 June 2010.

I think it is also important in this debate to acknowledge that National Heritage listing is not a means to restrict development. It is to ensure that National Heritage values are given appropriate weight in decision making when new developments are proposed. I would hate for you to think that National Heritage listing means that there would be no opportunity for future development in any particular region.

I listened closely to the member for Kalgoorlie. I was not aware of whether he provided any specific evidence of problems on behalf of particular constituents in his seat but, if so, I certainly urge him to encourage them to join in the process and make sure that their views are heard. I suspect he and I share what I consider to be of much greater concern in inhibiting development in this region: the duplication of approval processes and requirements from state, local and federal governments. If there is one thing I would really like to see us address, it is to ensure a much more streamlined process for all involved in those development applications.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, another Western Australian, Gary Gray, the member for Brand, on his progress with the East Kimberley Development Package. I am assuming that the member for Kalgoorlie is well aware that the Rudd Labor government entered into agreement again with the Western Australian government regarding a nation-building initiative which involved a joint assessment. It involved not only the Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia but also the Western Australian Minister for Regional Development, Brendon Grylls.

The parliamentary secretary, along with the relevant ministers in the Western Australian state government, has visited the East Kimberley several times to meet with local citizens, community groups, non-government organisations, business and the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley to hear and discuss their ideas on infrastructure requirements for the region. The
member for Kalgoorlie would be well aware that on 3 July last year the Prime Minister and the Western Australian Premier, Colin Barnett, launched the East Kimberley Development Package. This followed the Western Australian government’s decision to proceed with the expansion of the irrigated agricultural land around Kununurra and their commitment to the National Water Initiative.

Since that package was announced and agreed to between the parties we have seen a number of projects being launched. Some 29 individual projects are in some stage of planning, design or implementation in the East Kimberley. We have seen construction commence on several projects, including the upgrades to the Wyndham health facilities and the hospital component. We have seen the construction of staff housing begin. We have seen improvements in the residential rehabilitation facility near Wyndham. We have seen the Kununurra Airport upgrade for the patient transfer facility. The WA government has recently awarded contracts for the construction of 23 dwellings in Kununurra and Wyndham, and a tender is currently out for the construction of five more dwellings. We have community consultations progressing on 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 the designs for the Wyndham Community Jetty, which promises to have an important community aspect.

We have not forgotten the issue of employment, especially the issue of Indigenous employment. I am told by the parliamentary secretary that the first 12 participants to go through pre-employment apprenticeship training with Kimberley Group Training are 100 per cent local Indigenous people. Funding for salary and mentoring support for 20 new local apprentices will increase the availability of skilled labour in the region to come.

All of the projects funded under this package are scheduled to be completed by June 2012. Contrary, I think, to the concerns raised by the member for Kalgoorlie in his motion, there are two very good and complementary processes underway involving the Western Australian government, local participants, residents and Indigenous landowners in the Kimberley, both for the West Kimberley and the East Kimberley. I believe that with that level of cooperation there will only be good and successful development for the region to come out of those proposals.

I say to the member for Kalgoorlie: you are jumping the gun. The process is still underway. You can have your say, but you are a decade too late. You were part of a government that for 12 long years did not take one step to see cooperative assessment and evaluation of the Kimberley region. I am sorry to be partisan about it, but like you I also think the Kimberley is a very special place. I look forward to future development in the region as well as the protection of significant natural heritage areas.

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (8.15 pm)—Recently, Sue Bradley, a pastoral leaseholder who also runs a B&B, what is commonly referred to as a station stay business, within the proposed Kimberley heritage listed area—some 17 million hectares—raised the issue of the need to protect a small section of the Kimberley. She quite rightly was initially interested in protecting ancient Bradshaw stick-figure paintings of people, certain sections of the Mitchell Plateau and features of the north-west Kimberley coast. She was shocked when Minister Garrett nominated such a huge area, encompassing working pastoral, mining and business centres.
From past experience of declarations of wilderness areas, I can tell you that this proposed World Heritage listing will guarantee an explosion of introduced feral animals, vermin and noxious weeds. It will increase the potential for massive wildfires fed by unmaintained fuel on the ground, which naturally follows lock-ups of so-called wilderness and heritage areas, which because of size cannot be appropriately managed by government agencies such as the Department of Environment and Conservation Western Australia. They simply do not have the finances or personnel to adequately manage an area of that magnitude.

I recently visited the Kimberleys with my wife and we stayed at El Questro Station. El Questro operates as a pastoral lease and as a wilderness experience for tourists. It cohabits with nature. It protects the environment while running an eco-friendly pastoral business. The Kimberleys have been aptly described by many as a national treasure as well as a vital and critical part of Western Australia’s and Australia’s economies. This beautiful and productive part of our country has been responsibly managed, nurtured and protected by the people who settled it and live in it in a sustainable way, and who have done so for decades.

That description of the Kimberleys could be applied to the Kosciuszko National Park. I raise the issue of the Kosciuszko National Park as a means of advising my parliamentary colleagues, who may not be aware, of what will happen when you declare wilderness areas—areas that were previously inhabited by man and responsibly managed in company with nature for many, many decades. The Kosciuszko National Park was locked to pastoralists 30 or 40 years ago. Over the following decades there was an explosion of introduced animal pest species and noxious weeds. Despite governments of both political persuasions wanting to shut down Kosciuszko to anybody other than bushwalkers, it deteriorated to such an extent that in 1992 I made a prediction about what would happen. I warned my then volunteer bushfire brigades not to go into the Kosciuszko National Park if a lightning strike hit it because the fire would consume anything and everything in its path, and the intensity of the fire would destroy all the genes of the natural fauna and flora there.

Sadly, that came to pass in 2003 and it did not surprise me that it did. Unfortunately, the fire not only destroyed the genes of much of our native flora and fauna—because the fire was so hot it sterilised the earth 60 feet below the surface in some areas—but also created a massive social problem because it killed people and it destroyed property. That is the sad reality of going down the path of declaring wilderness areas that you cannot manage and to which you do not allocate sufficient resources to ensure that the weeds and the feral animals that have been introduced by man into those areas are responsibly managed, as they are when you have pastoralists and other businesses working in the area looking after the ecology of our natural environment in this great country of ours. So I caution all of these people pushing for this huge wilderness area in the Kimberleys to think very seriously about what I have just described. (Time expired)

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (8.20 pm)—I am concerned about, and opposed to, the member for Kalgoorlie’s motion opposing National Heritage listing for the Kimberley region for a number of reasons. The first reason is that the motion runs the risk of bringing about exactly the outcome that the member seems concerned to avoid. This is because it misrepresents both the assessment process and the effect of National Heritage listing. By making these claims—for example, the suggestion that the heritage listing consideration process will itself seriously
damage the future of mining in Australia—the member for Kalgoorlie is himself acting to undermine business and investment confidence.

The member’s motion also suggests that there is no meaningful community consultation being undertaken and this is clearly not the case, as explained comprehensively by my colleague the member for Hasluck. The recent history of this matter is that, in February 2008, the Australian and Western Australian governments reached an agreement that set out to achieve an ecologically sustainable development solution for the Kimberley region. Within the framework of that agreement, the objectives were to concentrate development and associated impacts at the best location and within a defined area; to properly consider the cumulative impacts of what has, to some degree, been the piecemeal development of the north-west of Western Australia; to put in place proper region-wide conservation and heritage protection; and to provide greater certainty to both industry and the community, especially in relation to future LNG related development. Under this agreement, it was accepted that the question of the location of an LNG hub and the question of appropriate and long neglected environmental and heritage conservation planning, both in the context of National Heritage listing and in the context of the North-west Marine Bioregional Plan, would proceed simultaneously and would be resolved in the course of 2010. This includes a strategic assessment under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The starting point for all of this, the first principle in any consideration of the Kimberley, is the recognition that it represents not just a vast area but also an immense part of Australia’s common wealth. That common wealth includes the mineral resources, it includes the precious and, in many cases, fragile environmental values of the region and, of course, it includes our Indigenous heritage. For those reasons, when it comes to determining how we should approach both development and conservation in the Kimberley, consultation must occur with the people who live and work in that region and especially with the Indigenous Australians whose continuous stewardship of the land has lasted tens of thousands of years.

In that context, I refer to the remarks made by Don Henry, CEO of the Australian Conservation Foundation, in support of the ACF’s productive working relationship with the Kimberley Land Council and the Kimberley traditional owners, where he said:

... we are committed to our collaborative efforts of the last decade to protect the Fitzroy River, progress options for ecologically sustainable and culturally appropriate economic development, and to promote National Heritage listing, with Traditional Owner consent, for the Kimberley.

The elements identified by Mr Henry are entirely in keeping with the purpose of the agreement in the framework process settled upon between the Australian and Western Australian governments. What is more, in September last year the Hon. Chris Ellison provided a preliminary report to the Western Australian government as part of the state government’s Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy, in which it was noted that most submissions referring to the National Heritage listing process have been positive and supportive.

This government knows the importance and the good common sense of taking a holistic approach to land management in development and conservation, in economic opportunity and in the social dividend that must flow from the private development of our common wealth. For those reasons, this government is intent on applying proper assessment processes to guide both the protection and the development of Australia’s natural resources.
The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts has made it clear from the outset that National Heritage listing of the Kimberley, should it occur, would not affect the continuing pastoral use of the area. Nor would National Heritage listing act as a means to directly restrict mining or related development in the Kimberley. National Heritage listing, if it should be applied to the Kimberley, would serve the important function of ensuring that heritage values are given due consideration in the decision making on any proposed development.

Finally, let us remember that our environmental and Indigenous heritage is not without economic value. Notwithstanding the member for Kalgoorlie’s comments on Sumatra and PNG, the lesson of the last 25 years in Australia is that tourism is one of the few sectors to have climbed the export earning ranks, taking its place as a major foreign income earner among resources and primary production. Protecting the environment is therefore both an end in itself and an act of economic responsibility. Many regard the Kimberley as an untapped tourism resource. As the representative of the largest single-member constituency in the world, I am sure that the member for Kalgoorlie can see the good sense in a large-scale and long-term approach to sustainable economic development in the north-west of Western Australia. (Time expired)

Dr WASHER (Moore) (8.26 pm)—I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Kalgoorlie. On 6 February 2008, the Commonwealth and WA governments agreed to commence a formal assessment of the national heritage values within the Kimberley region. The completion date for the assessment by the Australian Heritage Council has been set for 30 June 2010. The area being assessed is around 17 million hectares, generally extending from Roebuck Bay in the west to the Hann River in the east—including Drysdale River National Park—and from the Fitzroy River in the south to and including the Bonaparte and Buccaneer archipelagos in the north. Although the entire area is being assessed, it does not mean that the entire area will be recommended for listing.

Under the EPBC Act, actions that have or are likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national and environmental significance require approval from the minister, and national heritage is a matter of national environmental significance. Therefore, if parts of the Kimberley are placed on the National Heritage List any future proposal for development in these parts may require approval from the minister under the provisions of the act. Current pastoral business practices would not be affected by the listing, only future investment and development—and that is where the member for Kalgoorlie is concerned. Proposals are then usually approved with specific environmental conditions imposed so that the impacts on the national heritage values will be minimised. If the proposal can be assessed by WA state processes, the minister must make a decision on assessment within 30 business days. It is vital that that happens, if this is the case.

There are legitimate concerns that the government has not adequately communicated with the various interested holders in the region. This has led to confusion and concern about how they will be affected by the possible listing. It is critical that the government urgently address this issue and explain what the possible listing means for future development in the region. Once the assessment period has ended and areas selected for listing have been decided, the government must then identify and commit the necessary resources that will be required for management and protection.
It cannot be disputed that certain areas of the Kimberley must be protected for future generations. However, these areas cannot be listed simply to gain political kudos. These areas must be legitimately protected and maintained, and those stakeholders affected must clearly understand what is involved in the protection of those areas. Unnecessary red tape and impediments to future responsible pastoral and mining activities must be avoided at all costs—as the member for Hasluck said. The Kimberley region has been managed by humans for at least 50,000 years, and it would be impossible to achieve the heritage value of this region without human intervention—particularly for fire management and management of feral animals and plant pests. Continued engagement with our native populations and increasing their opportunities in constructive employment is vital for their future and that of the Kimberley.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jasmin Saffin)—Order! The time allotted for his debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed from 1 February.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jasmin Saffin)—The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Mr Simpkins (Cowan) (8.30 pm)—In January, I had a conversation with an education assistant who works with special needs children in a school in my electorate of Cowan. Amongst other matters she told me about her thoughts on foetal alcohol syndrome. Foetal alcohol syndrome is a disorder that affects the foetus when the mother uses alcohol. The alcohol can cross the placenta barrier and stunt growth and weight. It causes damage to neurons and brain structures. Foetal alcohol syndrome results in physical, mental and/or behavioural problems.

As a consequence of that conversation, with the assistance of the Parliamentary Library I undertook some research into the syndrome and more broadly foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I used to think that a pregnant woman drinking alcohol would put her child at risk of low birthweight and delayed development. Overall I was under an incorrect assumption that the problems were temporary and therefore I did not appreciate the highly negative and permanent outcomes involved. I would emphasise that my wife and, as I recall, my wife’s friends all abstained from alcohol during their pregnancies. I pretty much thought that everybody did, but I was wrong.

It was in the 1970s that the term ‘foetal alcohol syndrome’ was first used to describe a range of physical malformations in children exposed alcohol in utero. These abnormal features include growth retardation, characteristic facial features and central nervous system anomalies which include intellectual impairment. These features occur only in the extreme cases where mothers have had a history of heavy use of alcohol. ‘Alcohol related birth defects’ is another term used to describe those effects of alcohol where only some of the features that I have already described can be found. Similarly, the most common term used to describe the range of outcomes of alcohol use in pregnancy is ‘foetal alcohol spectrum disorders’.

There is no doubt that there is varying research regarding the amount of alcohol consumption that takes place to cause less severe forms of foetal alcohol syndrome. However, the evi-
dence is clear on the link between heavy drinking and the severe categories of foetal alcohol syndrome. As is so often the case, when doubt is expressed as to the level at which alcohol consumption becomes dangerous with reference to foetal alcohol syndrome, that may serve to make some people drop their guard on the matter. The point is that the only no-risk option is to abstain from any use of alcohol. Even minimal use introduces some level of risk to the healthy development of a child.

The question then becomes: how widespread is this problem? It is in fact very difficult to separate foetal alcohol syndrome from other developmental problems as a result of the difficulty in achieving an accurate diagnosis. Recognising the symptoms at the earliest stages is difficult, so may be some years later that the questions are asked and therefore made more difficult by recall bias, quantification of alcohol consumption, case ascertainment and analysis of alcohol consumption averaged to daily or weekly intake. It is also worth noting that general practitioners and even specialist paediatricians apparently have limited knowledge with regard to the identification and management of foetal alcohol related problems. Diagnosis is difficult because it does require the mother to admit to misusing alcohol, and the problems may also be an outcome of drug use. The problem is also that symptoms of foetal alcohol syndrome can also look like autism, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or even Asperger’s. The outward physical characteristics of a child with foetal alcohol syndrome are a small head circumference, small eye openings, small midface, a thin upper lip, skin folds at the corner of the eye, a low nasal bridge, a short nose and an indistinct groove or philtrum between the nose and the upper lip.

Foetal alcohol syndrome should worry us all. It results in permanent problems for a child inflicted by the pregnant mother’s reckless or ignorant use of alcohol. We should be very concerned and look for ways to discourage the use of any amount of alcohol during pregnancy. Figures in a fairly recent studies suggest that 50 per cent of Australian women used alcohol during their pregnancies and about 15 per cent drank alcohol at risky levels. That means that one in every two Australian women are risking permanent central nervous system damage and the other range of symptoms of foetal alcohol syndrome for the unborn child. This can occur because the brain of the child is damaged by the alcohol, resulting in underdevelopment or malformation. The cognitive and functional disabilities which can include poor memory, attention deficits, impulsive behaviour and poor cause-effect reasoning will result in a lifetime of problems for the child and ultimately for our society.

Foetal alcohol syndrome can also result in mental health problems and drug addiction. The reality is that there is no safe period during the pregnancy and no safe amount of alcohol, because the baby’s brain develops throughout the pregnancy. If we examine the outcomes of foetal alcohol syndrome versus the risk accepted by 50 per cent of mothers, we should be very worried. Questions to be asked by doctors when they are thinking about the diagnosis of a child with ADHD should include how much alcohol was consumed during pregnancy.

As a father, I worry a lot for my children. I also want the children in Cowan and across the entire country to grow up healthy and with all the opportunities they deserve to succeed in this nation. I have been critical in the past of those parents that do not encourage their children to work hard at school and be the very best they can be. I also believe that there should be more permanent adoption of children who live in negative environments involving illicit drugs or
crime in order for them to be saved from the bad examples inflicted upon them by those who should not be parents.

What is truly tragic in the case of foetal alcohol syndrome, and also in those cases where illicit drugs are passed to unborn children in utero, is that we cannot save those children from the failure inflicted upon them by the actions of their mothers. We cannot take them out of the unsafe environment, which we could if they had already been born. In this matter regarding foetal alcohol syndrome, children are damaged through no fault of their own, and through either ignorance or reckless indifference their futures are being undermined. While we may lament the lack of licences for parenting, the reality is that we must look towards education and warnings about the risks involved in the hope that alcohol use will be recognised as a risky option by pregnant women and, of course, by their partners. Certainly it is too late to cover the subject in antenatal classes and it may well be that emphasis on the problem would best be covered in high school health classes.

It seems that in this modern age there are a lot of behavioural problems: graffiti, hooning, antisocial behaviour and in some respects more violent crime. We have more and more diagnoses of disorders such as autism, Asperger’s, attention deficit disorders and hyperactivity generally. Maybe there is a reason behind these changes in our society. Maybe it is our own mistakes that contribute in part to these problems. I am not saying that every case of misbehaviour or misdiagnosed ADHD or autism is in fact foetal alcohol syndrome. I am not saying that pregnant women drinking alcohol are responsible for bearing damaged children who then create problems in our society and who themselves will never do as well as they could have because of their mothers. But I am saying that some small number of pregnant women have undermined and are undermining their children’s futures and costing society through their recklessness or ignorance of the risks involved with drinking alcohol.

As parents we have our responsibilities, and as citizens we also have our responsibilities. What this country needs in the future are more effective and productive young people out there achieving their potential and contributing to Australia’s future. What we do not need is more people on the disability support pension, on the dole, in jail or in need of additional support just because their parents did not know or did not care that drinking alcohol risked giving their unborn child major cognitive and reasoning impairments.

While we as a society should put up the warning signs, maybe more brightly than we have before, parents should also accept responsibility. I therefore call on the government to require the doctor at the time a pregnancy is confirmed to give the woman—or in fact the woman and partner—a warning leaflet about the risks of foetal alcohol syndrome and that that warning be noted. I would also like to see more consideration given to what else could be done to address this problem. Although these suggestions would be difficult to administer, I would like to see any means whereby parents are made to be accountable for undermining their children’s future.

While I am out meeting people in Cowan and we talk about graffiti, vandalism, hooning and other antisocial or violent behaviour, a lot of older residents say to me, ‘It never used to be like this.’ I wonder whether we are now reaping the outcomes of a possibly self-inflicted injury, an indulgence of reckless indifference or ignorance that will bring a heavy burden to families and ultimately to our society. What is the link between drinking during pregnancy and our societal problems? This seems to be a question worth asking.
Climate Change

Mr BIDGOOD (Dawson) (8.39 pm)—As the member for Dawson I am passionate about delivering for Dawson. I believe the commitments that have been given to the people who elected me have been delivered and delivered well. As part of the Rudd Labor government we have worked tirelessly to deliver for Dawson. We are delivering for Dawson. We have delivered on an apology to the Stolen Generation. We have delivered on getting rid of Work Choices—that is a great promise kept. We have delivered on the largest single pension increase ever—another great achievement of this Rudd Labor government. We have delivered an education revolution in our schools, universities and TAFEs, including delivering trade training centres and vocational education—another great achievement delivered. As a government we are building a stronger Australia and a fairer Australia and we have built a solid foundation to prepare Australia for future challenges.

Last election, like the coalition, we promised action on climate change. Our action is being frustrated in the Senate by a coalition who prefers to play politics on this important issue. This government believes Australia’s long-term future is best served by government action on climate change. Climate change action is in Australia’s national interest because, as one of the hottest and driest continents on earth, our environment and economy will be one of the hardest and fastest hit. The government’s responsible approach is based on global scientific consensus, including the work of Australian scientists from the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology. The government’s proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme encourages industry to invest in cleaner technologies like clean coal and cogeneration. Both of these technologies will generate new investment and new jobs for the people of Dawson. The fact is that the government’s market based scheme is the lowest cost way of reducing emissions.

The opposition leader’s climate change plan, highlighted in this place last week, is nothing more than a climate con job. It does less, costs more and will mean higher taxes or cuts to services like schools and hospitals. There are three problems with the opposition leader’s climate con job. Firstly, it does not work; secondly, it slugs taxpayers; and, thirdly, it is unfunded. It will mean higher taxes or cuts to services like schools and hospitals—something which we find totally unacceptable.

The government’s CPRS will support jobs. It encourages new investment in technologies and gears our economy to the lower carbon markets of the future. Our scheme is designed to help support the jobs of today while at the same time putting in place a scheme that will create the low-pollution jobs of the future. The CPRS has been designed to provide a significant degree of assistance to emissions-intensive trade-exposed industries in a way that retains their incentive to reduce their emissions. The government’s assistance to emissions-intensive trade-exposed industries is generous.

The CPRS and investments in clean energy will create jobs. That is good news for Australia and good news for the people of Dawson. Treasury modelling shows that Australia can continue to achieve strong trend economic growth while cutting emissions through the CPRS and that almost all industry sectors across the economy will continue to grow—again, good news for all concerned.

From an employment perspective all major employment sectors will grow over the years to 2020, with a substantial increase in employment on today’s levels. For example, national employment is projected to increase by 1.7 million jobs from 2008 to 2020, whilst at the same
time our carbon pollution falls—a win-win, a good result. Average income is projected to increase by at least $4,300 per person over the 12 years from 2008 to 2020 and with strong trend, real GDP and GNP growth—again, a win-win, good news for all concerned.

Treasury modelling also projects that by 2050 the renewable electricity sector will be 30 times larger than it is today. A 2009 Climate Institute study shows that $31 billion worth of clean energy projects are already underway or planned in response to the government’s climate change policies. These will generate around 26,000 new jobs, mostly in regional areas. That is good news for the people of Dawson, which is a very regional area. There will be 2,500 permanent jobs, 15,000 construction jobs and 8,600 indirect jobs in supporting sectors. This employment figure grows even more when you consider the figure does not include the thousands of jobs that will be created by the government’s $4 billion energy efficiency programs and over $2 billion for carbon capture and storage. This government is protecting the coalmines in the Bowen Basin and ensuring a long future for clean coal jobs. We believe in a clean future for coal and we are investing in it. The LNP candidate for Dawson is wrong when he states that thousands of jobs will be lost because of our action on climate change. His allegations are purely politically motivated and causing unnecessary anxiety in the community. A scare campaign does not an effective prospective new federal member make.

The Australian Treasury has undertaken a comprehensive economic modelling exercise to look at the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets on the Australian economy. This modelling shows that the coal industry will continue to grow and grow with the government’s CPRS. This is good news for jobs, good news for coal and good news for the environment, with clean coal technologies. Alternative modelling contained in reports paid for by the Australian Coal Association and others has been misleading. The LNP are running a scare campaign and nothing more on the issue. I believe the people of Dawson will see through their scare campaign. They want to see the government delivering on their election commitments to climate change action, not an out-of-touch coalition mocking and blocking the government on this important issue.

This government recognises the importance of the coal industry to our local economy and to our local jobs. Treasury modelling shows that coal industry output is projected to increase by more than 50 per cent by 2050. We are protecting coal jobs by allocating $750 million in targeted assistance over the first five years of the CPRS to the most gassy of mines. The government has contributed $2 billion for carbon capture and storage technologies and support for other infrastructure projects to help improve our export capacity. Ports are expanding, new mines are opening and the future for clean coal is assured under a Rudd Labor government. We also know the costs of failing to tackle climate change outweigh the costs of responsible action now. That is why we want to pass the CPRS this year.

We all need to play our part in tackling climate change. Businesses that argue that they should face absolutely no cost at all are basically arguing for households and other businesses to pick up their slack—this would not be fair. Failing to act will have a greater impact on jobs and on the economy. Treasury modelling from October 2008 shows that economies that defer action on climate change face long-term costs around 15 per cent higher than those that take action now.

The Garnaut report found that current emissions trends would have severe and costly impacts on agriculture infrastructure and iconic environmental assets and tourist destinations,
such as the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef provides around $5 billion in tourism revenue and employment for over 50,000 people. I truly am passionate about delivering jobs for the people of Dawson and for Australia through clean coal, saving the environment, reducing carbon emissions and all round having a win-win for everybody.

**Environment**

Mr IRONS (Swan) (8.49 pm)—It is good to hear the member for Dawson talking about saving the environment. The electorate I represent is named after the Swan River. However, there is a problem with the Swan River: it is slowly dying and this government is doing nothing to prevent it from doing so. Just before Christmas, six river dolphins were found dead in the river, which is symptomatic of rising nutrient levels. Yet remarkably, as this was happening, the federal government allowed funding for a vital pollutant monitoring scheme to lapse. In the wetlands there is a constant battle against feral weeds and animals, yet the federal government is cutting available funding, causing job losses and project cancellation. The Swan River foreshore is suffering from erosion, yet the federal government ignored a proposal from local governments to help fix the river walls. My grievance tonight therefore is with the federal government’s environment policy, which is far removed from tackling the real environmental problems in my electorate of Swan.

In mid-January I hosted a morning in the Canning wetlands for local environment groups with the state Minister for the Environment, Donna Faragher. It was good to see the Canning citizen of the year, Russell Gorton, from the Wilson Wetlands Action Group, Jo Stone from the Canning River Regional Park Volunteers with her husband, Dick, and representatives from SERCUL, Perth NRM and regional parks. Russell, Jo and I led the group on a walking tour designed to highlight the many problems facing the wetlands.

One of these problems is the prominence of hydrocotyl, a weed that spreads rapidly over the surface of water, choking marine life. The weed can even colonise land. Hydrocotyl has taken hold of Wilson Lagoon and there are concerns that it could once again colonise the major Canning River waterway as it has done in the past. Hydrocotyl is a very difficult weed to remove and it is sucking up resources in the Canning wetlands at the moment. Although hydrocotyl is a declared weed in Western Australia, it does not feature very highly on the Weeds of National Significance list. I think it is about No. 58 on the list. This means the wetlands cannot benefit from federal funding to the extent they should, placing more pressures on state and local voluntary resources.

We then crossed the Kent Street Weir and headed south to see the work Jo Stone has been doing at the Litoria Flats. Jo’s group, the Canning River Regional Park Volunteers, has been carefully revegetating a previously degraded area with natural vegetation. The result is a testament to the work of those volunteers. I think in the actual Canning River Regional Park area there are about 17 different volunteer groups that, without any government funding at all from a local council, state or federal level, do work on this magnificent jewel in my electorate. However, this work done by volunteers is being undermined by Labor’s cuts to Caring for our Country, which I have mentioned in this place before. Perth NRM has had its budget cut by millions, meaning it has had to cut back on jobs and projects.

Last Tuesday was the World Wetlands Day and to celebrate I hosted a group of River Guardians in my electorate of Swan. River Guardians are a group established to help protect and restore the rivers and foreshore. Members share ideas and knowledge, take part in river
events, enjoy new networks and receive training to better understand the rivers and their cultural heritage. The meeting was productive, with members raising a number of important issues. The issues ranged from river erosion to water quality and pests such as bees, feral cats and lorikeets. However, as diverse as the issues were, for every single issue raised the federal government is guilty of not doing enough to tackle it.

The World Wetlands Day celebrated on 2 February marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1971. The day is celebrated by undertaking actions to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits and to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is worthy of note that this year’s international theme is ‘Wetlands, biodiversity and climate change’ and its focus is on ‘Caring for our wetlands—an answer to climate change.’

This Labor government has neglected the link between the wetlands and an answer to climate change. It is cutting funding when it is needed the most and it is neglecting the Swan River when it is in its most serious trouble. By contrast, the coalition’s new direct action on climate change policy is a policy for the wetlands. The direct action policy would plant 20 million trees by 2020 to re-establish urban forests and green corridors. No-one I have spoken to in my electorate has said that the idea of planting 20 million trees is wrong. The Liberals’ green army proposal will also help with our wetlands issues by establishing a workforce of up to 15,000 people dedicated to local environmental projects across the country. Think how much easier it would be to control the hydrocotyl at the Wilson Lagoon with this.

Australia has some of the world’s most spectacular wetlands, and these policies would help preserve them. The wetlands are a complex issue and require careful management and care. On Sunday, I met with a group of local residents in Waterford, in my electorate of Swan. These people enjoy living next to the wetlands, with all the environmental benefits that this brings. However, there has been an explosion of mosquitoes recently and locals have been calling for fogging. Mr Luciano D’Ambrogio, who is organising the Waterford residents group, told me about his frustration in dealing with the council on this matter. This was reinforced by the 60 residents whom I met. I would also like to acknowledge Jacqueline Valente, who first contacted me about this issue and who is significantly involved with the group.

I now want to quote fairly extensively from the WA Department of Health’s latest information, which I believe explains why so many people in Waterford are concerned about these mosquitoes. According to the WA Department of Health, there are more than 100 species of mosquitoes in Western Australia. Members may be interested to know that only the female mosquitoes bite, as they need blood to help develop their eggs. While taking blood, mosquitoes can pass on disease-causing viruses and parasites. Exposure to large numbers of mosquitoes may increase a person’s chance of being infected with a mosquito-borne disease.

Worldwide, mosquito-borne viruses are a major cause of human and animal sickness and death. The Department of Health advises that in Western Australia there are four main mosquito-borne diseases of concern. The first disease, Ross River virus, is the most common mosquito-borne disease in WA. Its symptoms include joint pains, swelling, sore muscles, rash, fever and fatigue and may persist for several months or even years in unlucky individuals. In epidemic years, there may be hundreds of people affected in WA. The second disease, Barmah Forest virus, is not as common but has very similar symptoms to the Ross River virus disease. The third disease, Murray Valley encephalitis, is a rare but serious disease, occurring mainly
in the northern half of WA. In severe cases, brain damage, paralysis or death may result. The fourth disease is dog heartworm. This disease of dogs is caused by a parasitic worm, which, in large numbers, can clog the heart and seriously affect the blood flow.

The Department of Health advises that, in collaboration with local governments, it conducts mosquito control programs in areas where mosquitoes are suspected of carrying disease. However, despite these programs, the Ross River virus and the Barmah Forest virus will always be a threat because they occur in natural cycles between mosquitoes and animals, and it is simply not possible to eliminate all mosquitoes. Whilst mosquitoes are part of day-to-day life in Australia, I can understand why the residents of Waterford might be concerned about them when there is a population explosion like the one we are experiencing at the moment.

Fogging should always be the method of last resort because it does cause some damage to native flora and fauna, but I am confident that a balance can be struck which preserves the magnificence of the wetlands for future generations and enables the communities living along the wetlands to live in some comfort. I was happy to listen to the concerns of the local residents on Sunday, and I will try to facilitate a dialogue between them and the local council. Communication and consultation is so often the best way to go.

In conclusion, I have spoken about some of the key issues affecting the environment in my electorate, particularly the Swan River and the wetland areas. These are not easy issues and can only ever be solved by direct action. It is time this government got to grips with the local environment. Thank you.

**Shortland Electorate: 2010 Shortland Awards**

Ms HALL (Shortland) (8.58 pm)—Tonight, I would like to put on record the contributions to the Shortland community that have been made by some really outstanding people. A large number of these people have given their time freely, working as volunteers. In addition to those who have worked as volunteers, there have been others who have made enormous contributions in their working lives, giving a lot more than was required of them.

On the day before Australia Day, 25 January, I held the 2010 Shortland Awards. The awardees were people who had made an enormous contribution to the Shortland electorate and to our region as a whole. The awards are given annually and the awardees are nominated by members of the community. The people who received these awards have made an outstanding contribution, and it was appropriate that they received recognition just before Australia Day.

I would like to go through the names of the people who were successful in receiving these awards and share with the chamber some of their contributions. Robert and Valerie Aspinall are a husband and wife team who have given many years of voluntary service to our community. They have helped in P&C canteens, bushfire brigades and Landcare, and Mrs Aspinall has even knitted for premature babies. Tracey Blair is a young woman who has overcome enormous odds. She suffered from a brain tumour and is confined to a wheelchair. She has done a lot of work for Sailability and she even volunteers in my office. There is Mercia Buck for local government and the arts. Phil Costello works for Alcazar at Windale Public School. He is their ‘head gnome’. He works there daily, watering, weeding and helping everywhere.

Professor Jim Denham’s contribution to prostate cancer research and service to the community has been outstanding. Betty Duddle has worked for many community groups over a...
number of years, including the arts society at Toukley. Peter Field was nominated by Alcazar and also does work for many other groups. He coordinates the breakfast club, he is a volunteer coach driver for the Active After-school Communities program, and he is a driving force behind Windale Fresh. Mary Fitzgerald, who is also involved with Alcazar, helps with the grandparents group. Una Ford was nominated for her contribution to the Pink Ladies and she is also a life member of the United Hospital Auxiliaries.

Geoff Fry was diagnosed with prostate cancer and has become a prostate cancer counsellor. He has donated $1 million of his own money to setting up a prostate cancer centre in the Hunter. Keith Graham is involved in Meals on Wheels and has made enormous contributions to the Swansea community. Donna Harrison was a teacher at Lake Munmorah Public School for 29 years. The parents at that school nominated her for this award because of the enormous contribution she has made at and outside the school. She even tutored a child in hospital for six months, even though the child was not in her class. Phil Heaton is involved with the environment, the south Budgewoi Landcare group.

Jack and Myra Henry were nominated for their contribution to riding for the disabled. Robert Hopkins has been involved with many volunteer groups, but was specifically nominated for his service to pensioners. Gordon Hughes and John Jenkins were longstanding councillors at Lake Macquarie City Council. Both have retired from the council. Gordon is still very active in Rotary, Charlestown Carers and many other community groups, and John is also still active within the community. Josephine King was nominated for her contribution to the frail aged. She was involved with the Dudley Old Men’s Home, the oceans centre and now the East Lake Macquarie Dementia Service. Peter Laing is a teacher who has made an enormous contribution to children over the years.

Blake Lewin was nominated by the Lake Macquarie Tennis Centre for many years service to tennis, local golf and the neighbourhood watch association. Ricky Lewis is another outstanding member of Alcazar. He has worked with the breakfast club and at the Windale school. Betty Lowe was nominated for her contribution to seniors in Lake Munmorah. Sue McQuillan was nominated for her contributions to the Windale community. Les O’Loughlin was recognised for his contribution to education; he was a longstanding economics teacher at Belmont High School. Don Owers was nominated for his contribution to the environment and the cycling movement; Rosalie and Ron Parkes, for their contribution to the Swansea Belmont Surf Life Saving Club; Peter Payne, for his contribution to the Swansea Lions Club; Mike Peachey, for his contribution to the environment and to Sailability; and Kerri Pointer-Palmer, for her contribution to the Belmont Pink Ladies.

I would also like to acknowledge Dennis Roberts from Alcazar, with our public school; Matthew Ross, for his contribution to the environment in the Budgewoi community; Cathy Sjostedt for her contribution to Eleebana Public School—the principal of that school said that in all his time as a teacher he has never come across a woman who has contributed so much to a school; Dianne Smith, for her contribution to Charlestown Caring Group; Margaret Thirlwall, for her work at San Remo Neighbourhood Centre; Rita Thompson, for her contribution to the Lake Munmorah seniors; Clare Threlfo, for her contribution to the Charlestown Caring Group; Warren Welham, for his contribution to local government and to Lions; and, Trevor Wrightson, for his contribution to the Mannering Park community. All are outstanding recipients of the Shortland Award.
In addition I would like to recognise Garry Prince of Lake Munmorah, who was named the citizen of the year for Wyong Shire. And, in Lake Macquarie, I would like to acknowledge June Cameron from Warners Bay, who was the citizen of the year there, for her contribution to guides and girl scouts. There is also volunteer of the year, Diedre Ham, who has made an enormous contribution in a number of areas.

The community group of the year was the Delta Society, which visits people in nursing homes and hospitals. It takes pets to those places and really makes a difference in people’s lives.

I would like to now turn to Stuart Chalmers. Stuart is a very special person. He suffered a stroke some years ago now—it was in March 1991—and when he suffered that stroke it changed his life. He became very active in the community. He is a member of SADI, which is the stroke and disability information group in the Hunter. He is very active in the Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club. He is a life member of the Hunter surf-lifesaving branch and a member of the board of examiners of the Newcastle/Hunter branch of the surf-lifesaving movement. He has been involved in supervision of people on work release at the surf club. His contributions have been enormous. He is a shining light for anyone who has a disability. He shows what can be achieved. He is committed to every group that he has been involved in. He was awarded the Order of Australia this year and he was a truly fine recipient of that award. He shows that you do not have to let any adversity prevent you from achieving and having a full life.

These are fantastic Australians. Many of them are volunteers and have worked as volunteers for a very long time. But they are people who care about their community and they are going to make long-term, ongoing commitments to the communities in which they live, mostly on a volunteer basis, but some of them through the work that they do. I commend the actions of these people to the House and hold them up as shining lights for all Australians.

Paterson Electorate: Fuel Costs

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (9.08 pm)—I rise today to raise a grievance on behalf of those people who live in and drive through the Paterson electorate. They are people who rely on affordable fuel—people like working families, retirees, pensioners and young people who, all because of where they live, have no alternative other than to drive. And of course there are also the businesses that rely on transport for their business or are in the transport industry.

Paterson, because of the junction of the New England Highway and the Pacific Highway, is home to a lot of transport operations, which suffer the wild fluctuations in the price of fuel because of inaction by this government. Like them, I am concerned about rising fuel costs and discrepancies between local and city prices. In this House tonight I call on the government to urge the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to widen its monitoring of local petrol stations, and to take action.

Across Paterson there are a number of somewhat isolated coastal and regional areas whose residents rely on personal transport. While public buses and trains can be a cost-effective and low-carbon option, they are not always available or viable in regional and rural areas. This is due largely to the New South Wales Labor government’s inability to keep services up to scratch. Further, health-friendly options such as walking and cycling are not always appropri-
ate because of the age of my constituents and the large distances many of my constituents must travel for work, educational facilities and access to vital health services.

Therefore, while I am not an advocate of using personal travel on all occasions, I do recognise the need for local residents in Paterson to own and run cars and motorbikes. These are becoming increasingly costly to run as petrol prices climb. Motorists are now being forced to dig deep into their pockets to fill up the tank. The same can be said for fuel, interest rates, and electricity and water bills in the Paterson electorate. They are all on their way up, and up fast. They will increase even further if the Rudd Labor government has its way on its new emissions tax.

So much for Mr Rudd’s promises of cheaper living. Before the election, the Prime Minister led the Australian public to believe that he would cut the price of petrol. Taking matters into my own hands, I investigated which areas of my electorate are being monitored by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission for petrol prices. To date there are just two: Forster and Bulahdelah. Today I urge the ACCC to increase that number to ensure that checks and balances are in place for petrol stations in all towns across Paterson.

Allow me to explain how the ACCC works, and I quote from its website:

Just like most consumer goods in Australia, competition in the market determines the price we pay for fuel. It is important to know that the ACCC does not set fuel prices, but it does closely monitor the retail prices of unleaded, diesel and automotive LPG in Australia’s capital cities and in around 150 country towns. The ACCC uses this information to examine the competitiveness of retail fuel prices in the interests of consumers.

As mentioned, the ACCC currently monitors 150 country towns. However, today I call on the commission to increase that number to ensure competitiveness in the Paterson electorate. There are currently no areas being monitored in Port Stephens, and this is a major concern for my constituents. It is also a concern for the NRMA, which on 3 February this year called for an investigation into prices over the Australia Day long weekend. To quote from the Newcastle Herald:

The motoring body says Hunter motorists paid eight to nine cents more per litre of petrol than their Sydney counterparts over the holiday weekend.

I am not an economist, but it seems strange that prices could be 9c more in the Hunter than in Sydney, which is just 200 kilometres away, and given the fact that there is a fuel terminal in Newcastle. The Hunter is not an island, and it is easily accessed by fuel tankers. I believe that the main reason for this inequity is a lack of competition in the Australian petroleum industry, exacerbated by an indifferent Rudd Labor government.

Let me explain. Australia as a whole pays amongst the highest price for petrol of the OECD countries on a pretax basis. A look at the Australian Institute of Petroleum website shows time lags between falls in world prices and reductions in Australian bowser prices. It shows price gouging every week for payday. These are both signs of inadequate competition in a domestic market.

While this problem is Australia wide, the effects are exacerbated in rural areas, where the lower density of petrol stations reduces the amount of competing stations to within a reasonable distance. While the ACCC has not published which petrol stations it monitors, I suspect, with the Rudd Labor government’s love of concentrating bureaucracy in the cities, that few if any petrol stations are being monitored in my electorate. In the absence of any oversight on

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the side of consumers independent petrol stations are being driven out of the market, which will further reduce the competition.

I have been contacted by Bob, an independent petrol station owner from my electorate. He believes he has been the victim of predatory pricing by major fuel chains. The burden-of-proof requirements of the Trade Practices Act are enough that he does not have the resources to defend himself from these anticompetitive practices. Something needs to be done. Since it is now clear that Kevin Rudd is all talk and no action, my hope for action rests with the ACCC. I call for this action on behalf of all those people in my electorate who already have to cope with higher living costs and cannot sit by and watch petrol prices climb as well. A number of these people have written to me to express their concern, including Margaret from Corlette, who wrote:

I am fed up with paying so much for petrol. It has been over the $1.30 mark for most of the holiday period. Tamworth, which is notorious for high petrol prices, even had petrol at 20c per litre cheaper last weekend. Why is our area, and Newcastle yesterday, paying so much? Please report this to the pricing authorities. Something has gone wrong. We are being absolutely ripped off.

Arnold from Limeburners Creek wrote to me and said:

I would like to know why the ACCC or the government is not doing anything about this and why a price freeze cannot be put into place. We are being ripped off so badly, and no-one is stopping this. As a pensioner, by the time I buy fuel and food it then becomes a choice as to what bill gets paid next.

In support of Margaret and Arnold’s concerns are the recent price differences I noted between Sydney and the Hunter region. Today, for example, some residents are paying 132.9 in Port Stephens while many bowser in Sydney are set at an average of 123.9. I was astounded when I read the Australian Institute of Petroleum’s Weekly petrol prices report dated 7 February 2010. I found that Foster in my electorate was 5.5c more than the Sydney city average, Maitland was 6.9c more and Newcastle was 4.3c more. On average since May last year, the prices in the Foster area ranged from $1.13 to $1.20 on 3 January, peaking at $1.29 on 10 January, with a weekly average of 126.6. Why should consumers have to bear the brunt of rising petrol prices? Why should fuel in one part of my electorate be between 2c and 7c more than other parts?

During the 2007 election campaign, the then leader of the opposition, Kevin Rudd, said, ‘I think they’—the Howard government—‘have lost touch with working families under financial pressure, not just from interest rates, not just from rising rents but from grocery and petrol prices and the cost of child care.’ The Rudd Labor government promised the people of Australia action to deal with rising petrol prices and grocery prices. Instead of keeping his election promise to reduce the cost of petrol by ‘applying downward pressure on petrol prices’, he introduced the failed and very expensive Fuelwatch scheme. Fuelwatch was never going to deliver lower petrol prices. It was uncovered as a joke and a fraud—an expensive one at that. Again, Kevin Rudd failed to deliver on his promise to apply downward pressure on petrol prices and drive down the cost of fuel. The Rudd Labor government’s fascination with symbolic gestures and media spin has overshadowed its inability to drive the cost of fuel down.

As the elected member for Paterson, it is my duty to raise in parliament the concerns of my constituents, and that is what I am doing by speaking here today. I am here to urge the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to include more towns from the Paterson electorate in its list of those places monitored for fuel prices. Further, I am here to tell the Rudd
Labor government to do more, to take action and stop the spin and the rhetoric. Constituents in my electorate want action from a Rudd Labor government, action to lower the costs of living for all Australians. The Prime Minister would have you believe that middle- and high-income families are well off and can afford to shoulder this great big emissions tax he is about to introduce as well higher electricity prices and bigger grocery bills—and the list goes on. However, it is my experience in the current environment that many families who may once have been termed well off are now struggling as well. The Prime Minister must do something to help working families afford basic living costs.

The cost of petrol and the price variations are absolutely ridiculous, and there seems to be little or nothing that can be done by this government. Little or no action has been taken by the Trade Practices Commission through the ACCC to make sure that price gouging and the instability in petrol prices are levelled out. There seems to be very little or no correlation between the barrel price and the gate price. There seems to be no correlation on a consistent basis between the terminal gate price and the price of the fuel at the bowser. Distance seems to have little or no effect on the prices of fuel. The cost of shipping fuel from one petrol station to another makes no sense. Cheaper fuel will be delivered to one after it has driven past another. It just seems absolutely ridiculous. To quote the Prime Minister, the time to ‘apply downward pressure on fuel prices’ is now. My constituents deserve it; in fact, they demand it. I have been listening to my constituents in Paterson and I am in parliament fighting nationally for what they want.

Hasluck Electorate: Swan District Hospital

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (9.18 pm)—There are few things more important to communities than healthcare services, especially their local hospital. The north-eastern suburbs of Perth and surrounding wheat belt have been well served by Swan District Hospital for many, many years. Swan District Hospital has been under enormous pressure over the last decade, primarily because of the rapid growth in population and the consequent demand on hospital services.

In 2003-04, a comprehensive review was undertaken of the future health system needs of Western Australians by the Health Reform Committee. The report, known as the Reid report, recommended that Swan District Hospital be expanded to at least a 300-bed major general hospital to improve access to hospital care in high-growth metropolitan areas and to reduce demand on tertiary hospitals. Establishing large general hospitals in outer metropolitan areas with appropriate infrastructure, emergency departments, diagnostic facilities and theatres staffed by appropriately skilled clinicians would provide a comprehensive range of core clinical services where people live.

In November 2005, following the Reid report, the then state Labor government announced its intention to build a new 326-bed hospital in Midland at a cost of $182.7 million to replace Swan District Hospital. It was expected to be completed by 2011. The community and I celebrated the announcement of the proposed new Midland Health Campus. During 2006 the planning for the site commenced. In January 2007, the site’s structure plan was approved by the Midland Redevelopment Authority and the master-planning process commenced in February 2007. There was considerable consultation undertaken with the community as well as with clinicians and staff. I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural community consultation in October 2007. Regular newsletters were provided to staff in the community to keep them informed about the progress of the Midland Health Campus.
Following the 2008 state election, the new Liberal-National government assured the local community they were committed to the new Midland Health Campus. Despite this assurance, I became increasingly concerned about the lack of progress and the constant pushing back of the time frame for completion of the new facility. The Midland Health Campus is a vital piece of health infrastructure for my electorate of Hasluck and is needed to serve the health needs of the east metropolitan corridor and the Swan region. The state Minister for Health, the Hon. Kim Hames, affirmed his support for the new hospital in a Midland Health Campus project newsletter in December 2008. However, he referred in that same update, to a construction completion date of 2014—the original announcement was for completion by 2011—a three-year delay. It was further reported in early 2009 that Swan District Hospital staff feared that the hospital construction had again been delayed and was unlikely to be completed before 2015. In the same local newspaper article the state health minister, Kim Hames, denied the reports of a delayed completion date but then claimed that there was a $100 million funding shortfall in their budget for the hospital.

Of further concern, in an answer to a question in the Western Australian parliament the health minister said:

I do not resile from the fact that I am still ambitious about the completion of the hospital by 2014, but I shall have to consider different ways of doing it. One way is to talk to the commonwealth, and I have raised this as one of the projects to which it may like to contribute from the Infrastructure Australia fund to get it on budget. Another alternative is to consider, as we are doing with Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, whether a public-private partnership might not be an alternative method of seeking funding to get it on time and on budget.

The community, especially me, celebrated again when the Rudd Labor government committed funding of $180.1 million to the Midland Health Campus in the May budget last year under its nation-building Health and Hospitals Fund. The funding exceeded the shortfall claimed by the state government. However, I was bitterly disappointed that the state budget, released only days after the federal budget, made no funding provision for the Midland Health Campus. The Barnett government also failed to include any funding for the hospital in the recent mid-year financial review. It would appear the state government are shirking their funding responsibilities to the Midland Health Campus altogether. Despite the significant federal funding support it seems clear that the Liberal-National state government is planning to privatise the replacement for Swan District Hospital.

Minister Kim Hames was recently quoted in Midland-Kalamunda Reporter saying, ‘There are long-term savings to be made with the model, because a PPP—a public-private partnership—‘has predictable costs’. He said that the government were considering a model similar to what Joondalup Health Campus uses, where a private healthcare company would provide health services under contract to the government, for the Midland campus. Consider the example of Joondalup Health Campus, a public hospital privatised by the Court coalition government in the 1990s. In 1997 funding had to be removed from the major tertiary hospitals to direct funds to the privately operated Joondalup campus. Again, in 1999 Joondalup cancelled surgery and closed beds to public patients due to funding problems. The WA Labor government, elected in 2001, had to pour in extra funding to improve services at the hospital, including establishing an after-hours GP clinic, dental clinic, increased peak beds in winter, an expanded number of mental health beds and, in 2007, additional funding to redevelop the hospital. So much for the term ‘predictable costs’; it is more like predictable cost blow-outs.
What is more, in the WA Auditor-General’s report entitled *Private care for public patients*—a review of the contractual arrangements of the Joondalup and Peel health campuses, both based on the model supported by Minister Hames for Midland Health Campus—found that, firstly, the contracts relied excessively on self-regulation and third-party monitoring and, secondly, there was no clear contractual mechanism to ensure that the operator’s private commercial interests did not risk coming into conflict with its obligations under the contract.

On the question of supposed cost savings, the same Auditor-General report found that:

The contract does not provide any direct savings in service prices.

Further, it found that:

There is not, however, reliable information to establish that the contract provides net tangible benefits to the State relative to the public sector alternative from either services or facilities.

The Liberal Party in Western Australia has a track record of pursuing a privatisation agenda for ideological reasons, but history shows that privatisation does not deliver good outcomes in either patient care or cost savings. There has been a lack of honesty regarding the future of this project from the state government. After years of planning and community consultation about the replacement hospital, the state government is now ignoring local health service needs and putting the jobs of hundreds of Swan District Hospital staff at risk.

My experience of representing health workers for many years taught me that private sector providers need to make a profit. Usually this profit is gained off the back of health workers through lower rates of pay, worse shift arrangements and poorer patient-staff ratios. I am advised, for example, that the difference in rates of pay between the current Swan District Hospital support services staff and the same staff at Peel Health Campus is $4 an hour. That is $152 per week for already very low paid staff.

One of the seven key principles for health system reform determined by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission is that we should be ‘building a health system that is focused on people, not systems’. This includes the people who make the health system work as well as the people who use it.

After almost 17 months in power, the Barnett government needs to get on with the job of ensuring that the health needs of our region are properly looked after. I want an assurance from the Premier that the current hospital staff will not lose their jobs. I also want him to publicly commit to funding and a time frame for the completion of the new hospital. This is causing significant concern in my local community—a two- to three-year delay and a lack of commitment about a hospital that was found, nearly five years ago, to be in desperate need. Finally, the only PPP involving the Midland Health Campus should be that my region gets a hospital that is people-centred, public and professional.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—Order! The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 192B. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

*Main Committee adjourned at 9.29 pm*