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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

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
### Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Members of the House of Representatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<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]
RUDD MINISTRY—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</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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Thursday, 11 February 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9.00 am and read prayers.

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.00 am)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Flinders from moving the following motion forthwith: That the Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts must immediately attend the House and provide this Parliament, and the Australian people, with a full and honest account of all matters relating to the Government’s Home Insulation Program, including but not limited to the Minister, his office and the Department’s involvement in the provision of advice, other communications, management of the program and any decisions surrounding the very grave safety warnings received by the Government.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.01 am)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

Question put.

The House divided. [9.06 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes……………. 75
Noes……………. 60
Majority……… 15

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Birdgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S. Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M. Campbell, J.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Combet, G.
Crean, S.F. D’Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M. Debus, B.
Dreyfus, M.A. Elliot, J.
Ellis, A.L. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, M.J. Garrett, P.
George, J. Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J. Hale, D.F.
Hayes, C.P. Jackson, S.M.
Kerr, D.J.C. Livermore, K.F.
McKew, M. Murphy, J.
Neumann, S.K. Owens, J.
Perrett, G.D. Price, L.R.S.
Rea, K.M. Rishworth, A.L.
Saffin, J.A. Sidebottom, S.
Sullivan, J. Tanner, L.
Thomson, K.J. Turnour, J.P.
Zappia, A.

NOES

Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R. Chester, D.
Ciobo, S.M. Coulton, M.
Dutton, P.C. Farmer, P.F.
Fletcher, P. Forrest, J.A. *
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A. Hawker, D.P.M.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J. Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A. * Katter, R.C.
Keenan, M. Laming, A.
Ley, S.P. Lindsay, P.J.
Macfarlane, I.E. Marino, N.B.
Markus, L.E. May, M.A.
Mirabella, S. Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E. O’Dwyer, K.
Oakeshott, R.J.M. Pyne, C.
Ramsey, R. Randall, D.J.
Robb, A. Robert, S.R.
Ruddock, P.M. Schultz, A.

Ellis, K. Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Georganas, S.
Gibbons, S.W.
Gray, G.
Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G. *
Irwin, J.
Kelly, M.J.
King, C.F.
McClelland, R.B.
Melham, D.
Neal, B.J.
O’Connor, B.P.
Parke, M.
Pibberek, T.
Raguse, B.B.
Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L.
Shorten, W.R.
Smith, S.F.
Symon, M.
Thomson, C.
Trevor, C.
Vamvakinou, M.
Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (9.10 am) I second the motion. This minister should resign.

If he had any decency—

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

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (9.11 am) I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

Question put.

The House divided. [9.12 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes………… 75
Noes………… 60
Majority…….. 15

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E.
Byrne, A.M. Campbell, J.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Combet, G.
Crean, S.F. D’Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M. Debuss, B.
Dreyfus, M.A. Elliot, J.
Ellis, A.L. Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A. Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P. Georganas, S.
George, J. Gibbons, S.W.
Gillard, J.E. Gray, G.
Grierson, S.J. Griffin, A.P.

Hale, D.F. Hayes, C.P. *
Hayes, R. Jackson, S.M.
Kerr, D.J.C. Livermore, K.F.
McKew, M. Murphy, J.
Neumann, S.K. Owens, J.
Perrett, G.D. Price, L.R.S.
Rea, K.M. Rishworth, A.L.
Saffin, J.A. Siddon, S.
Sullivan, J. Tanner, L.
Thomson, K.J. Tournois, J.P.
Washer, M.J. Zappia, A.

Hall, J.G. *
Irwin, J.
Kelly, M.J.
King, C.F.
McClelland, R.B.
Melham, D.
Neal, B.J.
O’Connor, B.P.
Parke, M.
Plibersek, T.
Raguse, B.B.
Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L.
Shorten, W.R.
Smith, S.F.
Symon, M.
Thomson, C.
Trevor, C.
Vamvakinou, M.

NOES

Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R. Chester, D.
Gibbs, S.M. Coultan, M.
Dutton, P.C. Farmer, P.F.
Fletcher, P. Forrest, J.A. *
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A. Hawker, D.P.M.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J. Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A. * Katter, R.C.
Keenan, M. Laming, A.
Ley, S.P. Lindsay, P.J.
Macfarlane, I.E. Marino, N.B.
Markus, L.E. May, M.A.
Mirabella, S. Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E. O’Dwyer, K
Oakeshott, R.J.M. Pyne, C.
Ramsey, R. Randall, D.J.
Robb, A. Robert, S.R.
Ruddock, P.M. Schultz, A.
Scott, B.C. Seeker, P.D.
Simpkins, L. Sliper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H. Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J. Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E. Tuckey, C.W.
Turnbull, M. Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J. Wood, J.
* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question put:
That the motion (Mr Hunt's) be agreed to.

The House divided. [9.17 am]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ay es………… 59
Noes………… 76

Majority……… 17

AY ES
Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R. Chester, D.
Cibbo, S.M. Coulton, M.
Dutton, P.C. Farmer, P.F.
Fletcher, P. Forrest, J.A. *
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hawke, D.P.M.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J. Hasker, D.P.M.
Johnson, M.A. * Katter, R.C.
Keanan, M. Lindsay, P.J.
Ley, S.P. Laming, A.
Macfarlane, I.E. Mayo, M.A.
Markus, L.E. Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E. O'Dwyer, K
Fyne, C. Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J. Robb, A.
Robert, S.H. Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A. Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N. Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M. Southcott, A.J.
Stone, S.N. Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W. Turnbull, M.
Vale, D.S. Washer, M.J.
Wood, J.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E.
Byrne, A.M. Butler, M.C.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Combet, G.
Crean, S.F. D'Add, Y.M.
Danby, M. Debus, B.
Dreyfus, M.A. Elliot, J.
Ellis, A.L. Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A. Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P. Georganas, S.
George, J. Gibbons, S.W.
Gillard, J.E. Gray, G.
Grierson, S.J. Griffin, A.P.
Hale, D.F. Hall, J.G. *
Hayes, C.P. * Irwin, J.
Jackson, S.M. Kelly, M.J.
Kerr, D.J.C. King, C.F.
Livermore, K.F. McClelland, R.B.
McKew, M. Melah, D.
Murphy, J. Neal, B.J.
Neumann, S.K. O'Connor, B.P.
Oakeshott, R.J.M. Owens, J.
Parke, M. Perrett, G.D.
Plibersek, T. Price, L.R.S.
Raguse, B.B. Rea, K.M.
Ripoll, B.F. Rishworth, A.L.
Roxon, N.L. Saffin, J.A.
Shorten, W.R. Seller, S.
Smith, S.F. Sullivan, J.
Symon, M. Tanner, L.
Thomson, C. Thomson, K.J.
Trevor, C. Tournois, J.P.
Vamvakkinou, M. Zappia, A.

* denotes teller

Question negatived.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The SPEAKER—The member for Moreton, as I understand it, is seeking my indulgence. Indulgence is granted.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (9.22 am)—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Last night, in a taxation debate in the chamber, I made an insensitive comment, which I withdrew at the time. Just to inform the House: I phoned Senator Barnaby Joyce this morning and apologised to him for the comment that I made, and he accepted my apology. I also apologise to the families of any people I offended. I thank the House.
The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Moreton, and I thank others in the House who know that my gratitude goes to them for the way in which that matter has been dealt with.

PRIVILEGE

The SPEAKER (9.23 am)—As I have indicated, I will now make a response to the matters related to the unauthorised disclosure of committee proceedings of evidence of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works.

On 9 February 2010 the member for Chifley made a statement on behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and tabled the committee’s report relating to the unauthorised disclosure of the committee’s proceedings and evidence. The report follows the appearance of an article in the Townsville Bulletin on 5 February 2010 that appears to disclose the content of a confidential briefing given to the Public Works Committee on 4 February 2010.

In considering the issue of unauthorised disclosure of committee evidence and proceedings, the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests has suggested that two matters be established: (1) whether there is sufficient evidence that will enable the source of the disclosure to be ascertained; and (2) whether the circumstances of the case are such that the issues of the protection of the committee system, or the protection of committee sources or witnesses, would warrant further investigation.

I have examined carefully the report of the Public Works Committee and conclude the following. Firstly, in relation to the source of the alleged disclosure, I note that the member for Herbert, in a letter to the Public Works Committee dated 8 February 2010, has admitted that he was the source of the disclosure of committee information. It is unusual for the source of a disclosure to be so clear and, having been identified, for the person immediately to apologise and give undertakings not to disclose information in the future. Secondly, the Public Works Committee has expressed the view that the alleged disclosure may result in substantial interference with its future work, particularly affecting its relationship with key witnesses. It note that the consequences of this event will only become apparent as its work proceeds.

I regard the unauthorised disclosure of private information given to committees very seriously. I agree with comments made previously by the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests that such disclosures ‘display an offensive disregard for the committee itself and others associated with it, and ultimately a disregard for the rules and conventions of the houses’. In this case I note particularly the effect on the proceedings of the Public Works Committee, which, as the committee notes in its report, relies on relationships of trust built up with organisations, the Department of Defence in particular. I would be very concerned if there were a continuing effect on these relationships. However, the circumstances of this matter should give assurance to witnesses that the House and its committees regard these matters very seriously and will take action to protect the confidentiality of committee proceedings.

In relation to the member for Herbert, his actions not only raise matters for the Public Works Committee but create an adverse impression about the behaviour of all members and potentially adversely impact the work of all committees. It is not only a matter of privilege but also an action that relates to the ethical behaviour of a member, and this is yet another case where a members’ code of conduct might have been of some assistance.
The report from the Public Works Committee makes it clear that there is no disagreement as to the key facts in this case, and the member for Herbert has acknowledged and apologised for the breach of privilege. In these respects the committee in its report has dealt with matters that would ordinarily be covered by the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members’ Interests, and little would be achieved by further inquiry. It is my hope that the member for Herbert, and indeed all members, have learnt a valuable lesson from this very regrettable episode. I thank the committee for having thoroughly and expeditiously dealt with this matter.

**ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (CLOSE OF ROLLS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Byrne.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (9.27 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present legislation to reform and modernise the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918—the electoral act—and the Referendum Machinery Provisions Act 1984—the referendum act—and, in so doing, meet two of the government’s 2007 election commitments.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters—I will call it JSCEM—conducted an inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 federal election. The resulting report, entitled *Report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto*, contains 53 recommendations for electoral reform. Forty-five of these recommendations were unanimously supported.

The first four schedules deal with amendments arising from the JSCEM report. These amendments will:

- restore the close of rolls period to seven days after the issue of the writ for an election;
- repeal the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity;
- modernise enrolment processes to enable electors to update their enrolment details electronically;
- allow the Australian Electoral Commission to manage its workload more efficiently by enabling enrolment transactions to be processed outside the division for which the person is enrolling; and
- enable pre-poll votes cast in an elector’s ‘home’ division to be cast and counted as ordinary votes.

The final schedule deals with an issue that emerged at the 2009 Bradfield by-election and relates to multiple candidates being endorsed for a single division by the registered officer of a political party. This bill contains amendments that will allow the registered officer of a political party to endorse only one candidate for each division.

The overriding aim of the amendments in this bill is to enhance the ability of otherwise eligible Australians to participate in the electoral process by removing obstacles to their enrolment. The electoral act currently contains a number of hurdles to facilitating modern and technologically up-to-date interaction between the AEC and eligible electors. Of particular concern are the estimated 1.4 million eligible electors currently not on the electoral roll, with up to two-thirds of the missing electors falling within the 18- to 39-year age group. It is intended that amendments introduced in the bill will address declining enrolment rates and improve electoral participation in this age group, and more
generally, by enabling flexible and modern interaction between eligible electors and the AEC.

Passage of the bill during the 2010 autumn sittings is necessary to maximise the prospects that the reforms in the bill will be in place before the next federal election.

The amendments contained in the bill implement six reforms, to the electoral act and the referendum act. Three of the reforms, in schedules 3 and 4, implement recommendations of the JSCEM that received unanimous support.

**Schedule 1—Close of the rolls**

Schedule 1 to the bill deals with the close of the rolls for an election. There is a deadline for every federal election after which the roll will be 'closed' for an election. This is known as the 'close of the rolls' and specifies the date after which no additions or deletions can be made to the electoral roll. The certified list of voters for an election is a list of persons who enrolled or updated their details before the close of the rolls deadline.

The amendments proposed by schedule 1 implement one of the government’s pre-election commitments to restore the close of rolls period to seven days after the issue of the writ for an election. This amendment will provide sufficient time for new voters to enrol to vote for a federal election or existing electors to update their address details with the AEC.

**Schedule 2—Evidence of identity and provisional votes**

Schedule 2 to the bill repeals the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity. Provisional votes are a type of declaration vote cast by an elector at a polling place on polling day. The electoral act and the referendum act currently specify that a person who needs to cast a provisional vote at a polling place on polling day must provide a polling official with evidence of identity at the time of voting or by the first Friday following polling day. If the elector does not provide such evidence of identity by the deadline, his or her provisional vote will be excluded. The AEC estimates that over 27,000 provisional votes were excluded at the 2007 federal election due to the operation of the existing evidence of identity provisions.

In accordance with JSCEM recommendation 2, the bill will repeal the requirement for voters casting a provisional vote to provide evidence of identity and will instead insert the new requirement that, where there is any doubt as to the bona fides of the elector, the signature on the envelope containing a provisional vote be compared with the signature of the elector on previously lodged enrolment records.

The amendments in schedules 1 and 2 to the bill implement recommendations of the JSCEM supported by the government as necessary to provide eligible electors with the greatest opportunity to enrol and vote in an election.

**Schedule 3—‘Home’ division pre-poll votes as ordinary votes**

The amendments contained in schedule 3 to the bill will enable pre-poll votes issued in an elector’s ‘home’ division to be cast and counted as ordinary votes, wherever practicable.

The electoral act and the referendum act provide for pre-poll voting to take place prior to polling day. This provides electors who have specified other commitments to meet their voting obligations by voting early. Recent elections have seen a large increase in the demand for early voting; at the 2007 federal election almost 15 per cent of the total votes were cast as early votes.

The increase in demand for early voting has several consequences. First, it requires
the AEC to devote increased resources to deal with early voting as more resources are required to issue and count this type of vote. Second, the results of an election are more likely to be delayed as the counting of these early votes generally does not take place on polling night as the declaration envelopes containing the votes must go through the time-consuming preliminary scrutiny processes.

The bill provides for pre-poll votes cast in an elector’s home division, that is, the division in which the elector is enrolled, prior to polling day to be treated as ordinary votes, wherever practicable. For an elector to cast a pre-poll vote in this manner it will be conditional upon the elector making a declaration at the time of voting indicating that they are entitled to a pre-poll vote and the elector’s name being marked off the certified list. This will ensure that the integrity of this type of vote is maintained. Votes cast as ordinary votes in an elector’s home division, for counting purposes, will be treated in the same manner as ordinary votes cast in polling places on polling day. The AEC estimates that if this amendment had been in place for the 2007 federal election it would have resulted in an additional 667,000 votes being counted on polling night.

**Schedule 4—Efficient management of AEC workload & electronic address update**

Schedule 4 to the bill contains amendments that can be grouped into two main themes. The first theme provides for the efficient and effective management of AEC workload. The second theme enables electors to update their enrolment details electronically.

Recommendation 42 of the JSCEM report recommends that the electoral act should be amended to enable the AEC to manage its workload in non-election periods by allocating work, principally enrolment applications and enrolment changes, throughout the AEC divisional office network. The electoral act as it currently stands provides that such workload sharing can only take place during the election period. There is no apparent rationale for limiting the operation of this workload sharing to the election period. Expanding this ability will result in a number of benefits to electors and reduce handling times.

Such changes will allow the AEC to manage its workload more efficiently by enabling enrolment transactions to be processed outside the relevant division. These amendments will provide the AEC with additional tools to maintain the electoral roll in a timely and efficient manner.

These changes will ensure that the Electoral Commissioner has the obligation to receive and action any enrolment related transactions rather than only the divisional returning officer or the Australian electoral officer. The Electoral Commissioner will then use an enhanced delegation power to delegate the processing of the transactions to any AEC officer or member of staff, which may include divisional returning officers and Australian electoral officers.

The second theme of amendments in schedule 4 provides for modern enrolment processes to enable electors to update their enrolment details electronically. Despite recent trends encouraging Australians to communicate with government agencies electronically, the electoral act still requires voters to complete and sign papers when enrolling or updating their enrolment details. These forms are then required to be sent to the AEC by post to be entered into the electronic database used to maintain the electoral roll.

These amendments give effect to recommendation 9 of the JSCEM report and will
enable persons who are already on the electoral roll to update their address details by providing this information to the AEC in an electronic format. In addition to the requirement that the person is already on the electoral roll, the bill foreshadows the making of regulations which will prescribe minimum verification information which the elector will need to provide to the AEC before the Electoral Commissioner can act on the electronic communication. The regulations will enable the AEC to request prescribed information from electors—for example, date of birth and drivers licence number—to ensure that the electronic transaction is authentic and is being undertaken by the elector to whom the information relates.

These amendments will facilitate the maintenance of an effective electoral roll by enabling voters to communicate with the AEC by electronic means rather than by written hardcopy forms. These changes are the first tranche of electoral reform aimed at improving participation in the electoral system through enabling modern interaction between eligible electors and the AEC. The government has referred recent reforms in New South Wales, establishing a 'smart roll' in that jurisdiction, for examination by the JSCEM for inquiry and report. The government also released the second electoral reform green paper, Strengthening Australia's democracy, in September 2009, a paper which looked at options including automatic enrolment. The government is actively investigating whether and how automatic enrolment could be introduced at the Commonwealth level in the medium term.

**Schedule 5—Limitation on the number of endorsed candidates per division**

Schedule 5 to the bill contains reforms which will restrict the number of candidates that can be endorsed by a political party in any one division. At the by-election in the division of Bradfield on 5 December 2009 there were 22 candidates, nine of whom were endorsed by a registered officer of a single registered political party.

The ability for a registered officer of a political party to endorse candidates for an election was introduced into the electoral act in 1987 to provide a streamlined way for political parties to nominate candidates. If not endorsed by a registered political party, a person seeking to be a candidate for an election must obtain the support of 50 electors in the division in which the person is seeking to nominate. The current provisions of the electoral act do not prohibit political parties from endorsing more than one candidate in each division for an election.

For a voter to cast a formal vote they are required to number a ballot paper from ‘1’ to the number of candidates on the ballot paper without errors in the numbering sequence. At the above mentioned by-election for the division of Bradfield the rate of informal votes was nine per cent. This is a record for any election for the division of Bradfield and more than double the informality rate for the division at the 2007 federal election. The average national informality rate at the 2007 federal election was 3.95 per cent.

The practice of multiple candidates for a single division being endorsed by the registered officer of a political party had not emerged on this scale prior to the 2009 Bradfield by-election. Legislative amendment is required to prevent a similar rise in the informality rate in multiple divisions at the next federal election.

**Conclusion**

The government is committed to restoring the integrity of our electoral processes and systems. The first step in that process was the introduction of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Measures) Bill 2008, and the subse-
quent 2009 bill, which aimed to restore accountability, integrity and transparency to our system of donation disclosure. Unfortunately, those provisions have been blocked by the Senate. The reforms contained in this bill will continue the important process of updating the Commonwealth Electoral Act, as well as implementing two of the government’s 2007 election commitments.

Debate (on motion by Mr Baldwin) adjourned.

**COMMITTEES**

**Employment and Workplace Relations Committee**

**Primary Industries and Resources Committee**

**Health and Ageing Committee**

**Membership**

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Hon. BC Scott)—The Speaker has received advice from the Chief Government Whip nominating changes to membership of certain committees.

**Mr COMBET** (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (9.42 am)—by leave—I move:

That—

(1) Mr Hayes be discharged from the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations;

(2) Mr Bidgood be appointed a member of the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources and the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations;

(2) Mr Neumann be discharged from the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations and be appointed a member of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing; and

(4) Mr Fitzgibbon be appointed a member of the Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations.

Question agreed to.

**Treaties Committee Report**

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (Wills) (9.43 am)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I present the committee’s report entitled *Report 109: Treaty tabled on 2 February 2010*.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON**—by leave—

This report concerns the exchange of notes constituting an agreement between the government of the United States of America and the government of Australia to amend the agreement concerning space vehicle tracking and communication facilities. The year 2010 marks the 50th anniversary of the agreement between the government of the United States of America and the government of Australia concerning space vehicle tracking and communication facilities.

The agreement has provided significant benefits to Australian science with the establishment of major space industry infrastructure in Australia. It has also allowed Australia to be part of some of the human race’s greatest achievements. Images of the first few minutes of Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon were received first at Honeysuckle Creek tracking station, just outside Canberra.

The CSIRO and NASA jointly operate three facilities in Australia: the Canberra deep space tracking station at Tidbinbilla in the ACT and the tracking and data relay satellite ranging system facilities in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and Dongara in Western Australia.

The most significant of these facilities is the tracking station, which is one of only three such facilities in the world—the others being Madrid in Spain and Goldstone in the United States. The facilities are responsible
for providing a two-way communications link for the guidance and control of robotic spacecraft in deep space and for the relay of images and data.

The committee had the privilege of inspecting this impressive facility during the conduct of the inquiry. The Tidbinbilla space tracking station is less than an hour’s drive from Canberra, and I strongly commend it to members and indeed to people who may be listening to this broadcast. It is really an outstanding facility. It is free and open, I think, seven days a week. It is a tribute to the ingenuity of human intelligence. As a species we often do stupid things, but we are also capable of great intelligence. The capacity to explore space and discover all its secrets is a wonderful thing to see.

The agreement has been reviewed every 10 years since it was first made in 1960 and now consists of a basic agreement with multiple subsequent exchanges of notes. Both Australia and the United States have agreed to develop a consolidated agreement, incorporating the base agreement and all the exchanges of notes into a single document. To facilitate the development of the new agreement, the exchange of notes currently under consideration extends the life of the base agreement by two years.

The committee supports both the exchange of notes extending the agreement and the concept of negotiating a new consolidated agreement. Australia must ensure that its relationship with organisations like NASA is secure into the future. Only close relationships like those between the CSIRO and NASA will allow Australia to remain at the leading edge of technological development.

Nevertheless, the committee is concerned about how the treaty process has been handled in this instance. The current agreement ends on 26 February and the exchange of notes was only tabled in parliament on 2 February. The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator the Hon. Kim Carr, wrote to the committee requesting that consideration of the exchange of notes be expedited so that the agreement can be renewed by 26 February.

Because of the importance of the relationship between the CSIRO and NASA to Australian scientists, the committee has agreed to table a one-page report supporting treaty action in this instance. However, the committee is uncomfortable about making such a recommendation following such a short period for parliamentary and public scrutiny of a treaty action. Limiting the time available to the committee in this way undermines the effectiveness of parliamentary and public scrutiny of the exchange of notes.

I thank the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, and the staff of the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex, especially Dr Miriam Baltuck and Mr Glen Nagle, for assisting in the committee’s inquiry. I commend the report to the House.

Publications Committee
Report
Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.48 am)—I present the report from the Publications Committee sitting in conference with the Publications Committee of the Senate. Copies of the report are being placed on the table.

Report—by leave—agreed to.

EDUCATION SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS AMENDMENT (RE-REGISTRATION OF PROVIDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009
Consideration of Senate Message
Consideration resumed from 8 February.
Senate’s amendments—
(1) Schedule 1, item 11, page 5 (after line 7), after subsection 9A(1), insert:
A designated authority for a State must use a risk-management approach when considering whether to recommend that an approved provider should be re-registered.

Schedule 2, page 16 (after line 11), after item 5, insert:

5A Paragraph 29(1)(a)
Omit “less”, substitute “plus
(aa) the total of the prescribed amounts relating to expenses incurred by the student in connection with the course; less”.

5B Subsection 29(2)
Omit “paragraph (1)(b)”, substitute “paragraphs (1)(aa) and (b)”.  

Schedule 2, page 16 (after line 16), after item 6, insert:

6A Section 46
After “course money”, insert “and certain consequential costs”.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (9.49 am)—I move: That amendment (1) be agreed to. This amendment is being agreed to as a result of debate and discussions in the Senate. The approach that the government has taken to this bill and to the area of international education generally has been a bipartisan one. We worked in a cooperative way with the member for Boothby when he was the opposition spokesperson for this area, and I think there is a shared understanding in this parliament that our international education sector is facing challenges. Those challenges include, firstly, the potential for pressure on international education because of the global financial crisis and global recession. Secondly, those challenges include the regulatory issues that have now presented, particularly in the vocational education and training sector. Obviously, we have seen an explosive growth in the number of international students. This has caused regulatory concerns, particularly concerns that we may have seen the growth of a number of shonky providers in international education. The government is therefore working strongly with state governments to address these registration issues and indeed this bill is part of that process.

Thirdly, our international education sector has obviously felt the impact of and been highly concerned about violent incidents, particularly involving Indian students in Victoria. This has led to an outpouring from this parliament of our very clear view as a nation that such violence is despicable and not to be tolerated. It has led to a policing response; it has also led to a Council of Australian Governments’ response, as we work collaboratively on an international student strategy and a better way of supporting and facilitating international students. I believe this work has generally proceeded in a bipartisan way and we have tried to take the same approach to this piece of legislation.

When this bill was first before the House of Representatives, we accepted some propositions put forward by the member for Boothby. In this amendment we are now accepting a further proposition put forward by the opposition. When this amendment was first suggested in the House, the resulting debate concluded that, given the states and territories have the responsibility for the re-registration process, the risk management concept needed to be developed and delivered by them. So everybody was on the same page that a risk management approach needed to be taken. The outstanding question in the House of Representatives debate resulted in the conclusion that this did not need a legislative backing; it was occurring through the work being done by states and territories. Indeed, all Australian governments supported the concept of risk management and agreed to it at the relevant min-
isterial council. Through the Joint Committee for International Education, detailed work regarding the reregistration process and the risk management approach was undertaken, and as soon as this bill is passed a consistent risk management approach will swing into action. States and territories have agreed to process the highest risk providers by 1 July and all providers by December 2010.

In the government’s view this amendment was not necessary, though of course we endorsed a risk management approach. But, in the interests of continuing the cooperation that there has been in this area, we have accepted the amendment which would formalise this approach. With the acceptance of this amendment, I would strenuously ask the opposition and the Senate to allow this bill to pass in a speedy fashion. We are now at the stage where further delay could jeopardise the delivery of the reregistration processes required by this bill, and jeopardising that reregistration process then jeopardises our ability to ensure that we can restore full confidence in the quality of each and every provider in international education. With those words, clearly the government is accepting the first amendment.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (9.54 am)—I will not delay the House for long. We have listened to the minister’s speech. Obviously, this is an amendment that the opposition sponsored in the Senate and that the member for Boothby, the former shadow minister, initiated in the first place. I will say just a few words about this amendment because I think we have a different view about the other amendments that are coming from the Senate.

The provision of education to overseas students in Australia is worth about $15.5 billion in export income and is our third largest export earner. It is critical that such a significant export be maintained. Concerning allegations have been made against some private education providers. Some students have reported, despite complying with all the requirements of studying in Australia, being asked by providers to pay additional fees over and above their agreed payments or risk having the college have their visas revoked. A series of training college closures in 2009 and a series of other related issues have contributed to a loss of confidence in our international education services, and our reputation as a high-quality provider is at risk because of the practices of some unscrupulous providers and education agents. Fraudulent practices can cause irreparable damage to this important industry, and it is time that the government matches its talk with the action needed to sort out these concerns.

Improving accountability not just of colleges and education agents but also of territory and state regulators is vital. This legislation was introduced in August last year two days before the minister announced her visit to India and, despite the minister reassuring the Indian government at length that the Rudd government was making moves to improve the quality of education services for overseas students, legislation has lingered for nearly seven months. The Rudd government could have acted more swiftly, by prioritising this legislation, to weed out the shonky operators from the majority of the solid performers and should have acted much sooner to reregister providers and leave out those that should not be part of this industry.

We support the requirement of reregistration of all education providers who are currently registered through the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students by December 2010. While we have acknowledged the legislation before us is a reasonable first step and will support it, we do not think it is as well targeted as it could and should be. This is why the coalition proposed some straightforward amendments aimed at tightening up the legislation.
and preventing students being duped by incompetent or dishonest providers. In particular, we introduced amendments aimed at ensuring regulatory bodies for a state follow a risk management approach when determining reregistration of providers. Risk management principles ought to cover areas such as the accreditation of employed staff and educational services, the length of time providers have been operating and a strengthened focus on financials. It is also critical that education agents are providing reliable and up-to-date information to prospective students.

I am pleased that the Senate last week supported our amendment that will push the states to commit to a more vigorous auditing process during the reregistration of providers and I am pleased that the government has accepted the amendment, as indicated by the minister today.

Question agreed to.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (9.57 am)—I move:

That amendments (2) and (3) be disagreed to.

These amendments are about inserting into the act the concept that, beyond the current fee refund guarantee that international students have as a result of our consumer protection framework, international students should also be able to get consequential costs. There is no definition of ‘consequential costs’, but obviously they could include the cost of travelling to Australia, the cost of accommodation and food, education agent expenses, travel and medical insurance costs, airport taxes, the cost of immunisations, domestic travel costs, the costs of books and computers, and other education expenses. There is no definition, so consequently there is no way of costing the financial impost of these amendments.

Consequently, the government opposes these amendments on two grounds. Firstly, they are premature because the underlying consumer protection framework for international students is the subject of a review by Mr Bruce Baird, who of course is known to the House as a former Liberal member of this parliament. We created the Baird review in advance of time. Such a review was recommended by the Bradley review of higher education and we decided to expedite it. We put it into the hands of Mr Bruce Baird because we have confidence in him to deal with this issue and we also believe that he can command the confidence of both sides of the House.

So, firstly, this is premature. We first need to get the work from the Baird review. Secondly, on fiscal grounds these amendments cannot be agreed to. They are not costed. They would put an unknowable burden on Australian taxpayers in circumstances where Australian students who go overseas to study do not get the benefits of the kind of consumer protection we already have—let alone a consumer protection framework like that extended by these amendments. I simply do not believe that it is appropriate to put on the shoulders of Australian taxpayers the costs flowing from these amendments when they are unknowable.

From time to time in this parliament we hear questions raised by the shadow Treasurer, in particular, about debt, deficit and unfunded promises. In fact, we heard that as recently as yesterday. The simple truth about these amendments is they are not costed and they are not funded. If they were agreed to, there are only so many ways in which they could be funded. The opposition would have to identify which taxes it believed should be increased to fund these amendments, it would have to identify which other government expenditures it believed should be cut back to free money up to support these
amendments, or it would have to acknowledge that by its conduct it is increasing debt and deficit. Those things are not prudent fiscal approaches and they will not be agreed to by this government.

On the question of a timely response in international education, can I say to the member for Sturt: it becomes a bit difficult for the opposition to complain about delay and then cause delay. These amendments were moved in the Senate by Senator Xenophon. I would have thought the prudent course for the opposition—given that the amendments were new, uncosted and unfunded—would have been to not support the amendments. We are obviously now asking the Senate to not support uncosted, unfunded amendments, putting additional burdens on the shoulders of hardworking Australian taxpayers and, of course, prejudging the Baird review, which is going to provide the government and, indeed, the parliament with further detailed advice about what, if any, additional steps need to be taken in our consumer protection framework.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (10.02 am)—The coalition supported the amendments moved by Senator Xenophon and the Greens in the Senate which would enable the government to make arrangements for consequential costs incurred by the victims of collapsed private training colleges. At the moment, only direct losses of fees paid can be compensated under the fund. We support these amendments because they are about providing some appropriate protections for students who are caught up, through no fault of their own, in the collapse of these colleges. While the minister tried to tell us that these amendments are ill-considered and that they could not commit to such costs, I would make the point that these amendments simply provide the minister with the power to make regulations to provide for consequential losses for students where there has been a collapse of a college.

We do realise that further amendments may be likely in the near future, especially once the Baird review—chaired by my former colleague and very good former member for Cook—which will further look at this legislation, has reported. But the Rudd government should immediately pass this important legislation with the amendments provided by the Senate to improve the quality of education services for overseas students in Australia. The coalition does not agree to the motion moved by the Minister for Education that the Senate amendments moved by Senator Xenophon and the Greens be disagreed to.

Question agreed to.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (10.04 am)—I present the reasons for the House disagreeing to the Senate amendments and I move:

That the reasons be adopted.

Question agreed to.

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
There is no more important legislation that this House will debate than the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related bills. The government accepts that climate change is a reality. We on this side of parliament accept the myriad of scientific work that supports the fact. Members of the opposition who are climate change deniers have trawled the internet for papers supporting their position, and of course they found some. That is the nature of science: scientists put forward different hypotheses.

I have read papers on both sides of the argument, and I remain totally unconvinced by those who argue that climate change is not a reality. It is important to note that for every paper denying climate change there are a multitude of papers arguing that climate change caused by greenhouse gases which come from human activity is a reality. Australia and the world are getting hotter. Australia is getting hotter and drier. We only have to look to the record temperatures recorded this summer, particularly in Melbourne and Adelaide, and the fact that the temperatures this summer have been the second highest on record.

Climate change is a global problem caused by the emission of CO2 generated by human activity. Our planet is getting hotter and the last decade was the hottest in recorded history. That is coming from scientific data which was released in December. The previous decade was the second hottest decade in recorded history. These figures come from the Bureau of Meteorology. I would argue to those people who deny the fact that climate change exists that they just have to look at these figures and read some of the scientific papers I have referred to. They need to accept the fact that climate change is a reality, that it has the potential to drastically change our way of life, that it has the potential to impact drastically on sea levels, that it will impact on food production and that it will change the world as we know it. I am not being alarmist in saying this.

This parliament is faced with the dilemma of doing nothing or acting now. Those on the other side have put forward a rather Mickey Mouse proposal to deal with climate change that will lead to a 13 per cent increase in CO2 rather than a reduction. I support what Garnaut stated in his report—that we have two options: do nothing or act now. I am very much in favour of the ‘act now’ position and that is what I see this legislation doing—putting in place the framework for us to act now. I do not agree at all with the approach of Lord Monckton, a person the Leader of the Opposition has been keen to associate himself with, when he asks what the harm is in waiting. The harm in waiting is enormous.
I heard him say on television: ‘Leave it for 10 years. Act then if it is necessary. Leave it for 10 years.’ Our ability to act would be very much impacted upon in that time and much change would have happened. The number of islands in the Pacific impacted by water levels would have increased. I think that approach is irresponsible and is a pathway to annihilation.

Even if a person or members on the other side of this parliament have some doubts about climate change, surely they are interested in taking out insurance. I think I read in one of the Leader of the Opposition’s former speeches that he did not believe that climate change exists and he tended to refer to it as ‘crap’. He still stated that it was important to take out insurance. He has obviously moved from that position—I think there has been a little more movement today and I will talk about that a little later. I ask members on the other side of this parliament whether they insure their houses against fire. I suspect they do. Are their houses likely to be burnt down? Not really. So this CPRS is, at the very least, insurance that the opposition is not prepared to take out.

I argue that it is imperative that this parliament shows leadership and delivers a framework that will lead to a reduction in emissions and counteract climate change and that is what this legislation does. It provides us with a framework to do exactly that. When John Howard was Prime Minister and the current Leader of the Opposition was in his cabinet, he accepted the reality of climate change. In fact, the opposition went to the election with a scheme very similar to the scheme which is before the parliament today. But what a difference a change in opposition leader makes. Prior to December we had an opposition that was prepared to engage with the government to try and develop a whole-of-parliament solution to this very important issue. Today we have an opposition leader who is showing that all he is concerned with is politics and politicising one of the most important issues facing this parliament, this nation and our planet. I refer to the Shergold report which was commissioned by the previous Prime Minister, which he accepted. Now we have the Leader of the Opposition turning away from what his mentor, the previous Prime Minister, had to say. I express my disillusionment with the Leader of the Opposition because he has a different position every day.

Climate change is a very serious matter. Last year I visited the Solomon Islands with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing. We were looking at health issues in the Pacific and climate change was identified there as a significant issue. It was pointed out to the committee, whilst we were at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara, that the water level, which was no more than 10 metres from the hospital, had previously been 150 metres from the hospital and that there had been an orchard growing between the hospital and the ocean. One of the doctors said to me that he lies awake at night worrying about what will happen to the hospital.

We visited Gizo, another island, which had an increase in population because the population of a neighbouring island had been forced to move to Gizo, because their island had been affected by rising sea levels. This is really serious. It is something that we in Australia cannot ignore. It affects the whole of the planet. The recently released report on the impacts of climate change identified Shortland electorate as an electorate that would be significantly affected by climate change and rising sea levels. The local council gave evidence to the environment committee when they were looking at this issue. This evidence showed that a large proportion of Shortland electorate would go under water. There have had to be changes to the
building codes, which will lead to expenses for people building in the area. It is an issue that I see every day. It is an issue that confronts people in the electorate that I live in. I do not want to see people living near the lake or near the Pacific Ocean losing their houses and being affected by rising sea levels caused by CO2 emissions and climate change and caused by not addressing these issues—by us in this parliament not showing the leadership that we are put here to show. I believe that the way to show this leadership and address this problem is to support the CPRS legislation that we have before us.

We need to explain a little better to the community what a CPRS is. The one thing that the Leader of the Opposition and members of the opposition have been successful in doing is creating confusion. They have created confusion by playing political games. They have been dishonest. They have not told the Australian people what a CPRS is. The CPRS is a cap on CO2 emissions. It puts in place a limit on the amount of CO2 and its equivalents that can be emitted. Those industries that emit CO2 must obtain a permit or a licence to do so. These permits can be purchased from the government or from other emitters. So there can be a trade in the licences. It is a scheme where the polluters pay, not the government or the taxpayer. It will lead to a five per cent reduction in emissions between 2000 and 2020.

There are some people who say that this reduction should be greater. But those on the other side do not agree. They do not think it should happen at all. That is what their actions in this parliament are delivering: nothing. If we go back to what Garnaut said, ‘We are faced with a choice of acting now or doing nothing.’ Those on the other side of this parliament opt for the ‘do nothing’ approach. The white paper estimates that the CPRS will result in a one per cent CPI increase. I note the member for Wentworth in his contribution compared this to a 2.8 per cent increase associated with the GST. The GST was a tax. It was a great big tax. It was nothing but a tax. The opposition, when it was in government, went to the people and said: ‘I want to tax you. I want to get more money from you. We want to place this tax on almost everything.’ The CPRS is an investment in the future. It is an investment in our planet.

I noticed that in the media today the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for the environment have failed to rule out that they would introduce an ETS in the future. Talk about double standards! I think that demonstrates it very clearly. It is important to note that the legislation will lead to some increased costs, but the government is providing support to low- and middle-income families, with upfront assistance to help with the impact of the scheme. The package will include tax assistance, tax offsets and other measures to help households maintain their standard of living. There will also be increases to pensions, benefits and allowance payments.

In the time remaining, I would like to compare the government’s actions with the opposition’s. I have already stated the Leader of the Opposition is a total climate change denier. He thinks it is absolute crap and as such we can understand why his policy, which is a bit of a con job, has been put on the table. It is the kind of climate policy you put out there when you really do not want to put in place a climate policy. It costs more, it does less and it is unfunded. It slugs taxpayers instead of the big polluters. If you remember, Mr Deputy Speaker, when I was talking about the CPRS, it is the polluters that actually pay. Under the Leader of the Opposition’s scheme it will cost taxpayers three times more than the government’s CPRS over the next 10 years. That is significant. Talking about a big tax, how are the opposition going to raise the money for the
proposal they put forward? Obviously, it is going to be through increased taxes or reduced services. We all know that the Leader of the Opposition favours a scheme where people become eligible for the pension at age 70. Maybe that is a way he is looking at recouping money.

The other point I would like to make about the scheme put forward by the Leader of the Opposition is that experts in the Department of Climate Change have advised that it will not work; rather than reducing emissions it will actually lead to an increase in emissions. While the CPRS will lead to a reduction in emissions of five per cent, the opposition’s unfunded policy will lead to an increase of 13 per cent.

It is important to note that the CPRS will deliver a real reduction in carbon dioxide emissions while the proposal put forward by the opposition does less, costs more and is unfunded. I urge the opposition to support the legislation. It is about the future of the planet. It is not about cheap politics or winning the next election; rather, it is about ensuring the future for our children and grandchildren.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (10.25 am)—What I find amazing is that the government has thousands of public servants at its disposal and all we have got are these standard words, these catchcries and these denigrations of individuals. It depicts a government that is a little bit rattled and a little bit concerned, and that is all it has got. I really wonder how it has come to this: the government reintroducing this failure of a scheme for the third time. Support for the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2010 and related bills is dwindling about as far down as the number of people who actually understand it, yet the member for Shortland asked us to explain the government’s scheme when the government cannot even do it itself.

Clearly what has happened in this country is that the government has come up with this scheme that it does not really know is all about, as I will explain later. Just yesterday morning when the ABC news wanted an expert on the CPRS and this legislation they did not go to the government; instead, they went to the Australian National University. That is what it has come to. It is expensive, ineffective, damaging to the national interest and an abject failure that is only eclipsed by the failure that was Copenhagen—unless you were on the delegation on the trip and one of the 114 members of the Prime Minister’s key, essential staff. Actually, 114 is a familiar figure. Wait! That is the cost of the CPRS—$114 billion of skew on the Australian economy which will end up doing nothing.

Before I begin I will repeat some facts from a speech that I made in October last year, as it is important to understand just what we are dealing with regarding CO2—the stuff that is described as pollution by the government. Carbon dioxide or CO2 is just one of the gases described as a greenhouse gas. The reality is that the greenhouse gases in total make up just one per cent of the atmosphere. To go further, of that one per cent of the atmosphere that is greenhouse gases, 75 to 95 per cent is water vapour. So when we talk about CO2 it represents less than five per cent of that one per cent of the total atmosphere.

But that is not the end of it, because human produced carbon dioxide represents just seven per cent of the CO2 emissions and Australia produces 1.4 per cent of that figure. So, if my calculations are correct, the carbon dioxide produced within this nation represents around 0.0000002 per cent of the atmosphere and that is what the government is trying to reduce. In that attempt to reduce a small number by an even smaller number, last year Access Economics predicted 13,000 jobs would be lost in Western Australia. That
is a big cost. Price rises of 12.5 per cent are to be expected on average just to reduce that 0.0000002 per cent by five per cent.

The question is why we would want to pay that price for so little return. The government seeks to impose on this nation a $114 billion great big new tax on everything. The government seeks to fundamentally alter the national economy and skew everything in order to reduce Australia’s human induced CO2 from a very small number to a number which is only slightly smaller. That figure would be eclipsed by a couple of months of economic growth in China or even a volcanic eruption. The skewed economy the government wants would also result in carbon and job leakages to nations with lower environmental standards than we have. Again, what is the benefit? It would be a very expensive, economy-altering super tax that would substantially alter the economy for no environmental benefits.

I struggle to find anything good about these bills and the government, as we know, has been unable to explain how it works to the Australian people. As I said before, just yesterday morning when the ABC were looking for an expert they could be sure would explain the CPRS they did not go to the government—or maybe they did go to the government but the government did not want to be part of it. Instead, they went to the ANU—a sad but consistent indictment of the government’s knowledge of its own legislation perhaps.

With regard to these bills, I have—as have, I am sure, many other members—received many more emails telling me to vote against the ETS than to vote for it. I can assure them all that I will not be voting for the ETS; I will not be voting for any of these bills. There will come a day when we will all be held accountable for our actions and what we say here. I am prepared to stand by my actions in doing the right thing. Obviously those on the other side absolutely stand by their arguments about the threats that face the world. What we do not hear very much about from the government is the detailed science. The main thing you have to when you are trying to win an argument is to provide proof. I believe there is only one real scientist in the House of Representatives, and that is the member for Tangney, so he is worth listening to. He is an authority and has justification for speaking on scientific matters. But from the other side we hear only assertions, denigrations and abuse of alternative views. Over there, the members on the government side hide behind the lines given by the ministerial officers, and I remind them that when they appear here with all of their unequivocal assertions they in effect align themselves lock, stock and barrel with absolute blind faith. What I intend to show is that there is enough information out there to challenge the position that the government members have locked themselves into.

So, when they come into this place and propose an ETS and abuse us for any alternatives that provide very broad and realistic benefits for a sustainable future like direct action does, they should be aware that the science is not settled and they have aligned themselves with vested interests. I am not a scientist. It would therefore be reckless of me to state the categorical truth of the matter regarding the disputed science that abounds. I take an approach which is contrary to that of those who sit opposite. They sit there confident and certain, comfortably living in a world of black and white, where their side is right and the other side is wrong—where the evidence that disputes their position is completely dismissed behind allegations of dinosaurs, deniers, sceptics and other terms designed not to defend their position with reasoned argument but just to denigrate alternative views or questions. I will therefore take
this opportunity to speak about the science in some detail, which would probably surprise my high school chemistry teacher, given my results.

One of the big claims regarding global warming is the theory something like what the Hollywood disaster movie *The Day After Tomorrow* was apparently modelled on, so I assume that the government members would support the concept that global warming may shut down the thermohaline circulation in the oceans. Yet a 2006 research paper actually observed a strengthening of the circulation, not a weakening. So that is one big claim about global warming about which there is scientific evidence that says otherwise. If anyone in this place has not heard of MIT climate scientist Richard Lindzen then they should read more widely on the science. It is Richard Lindzen’s paper from last year regarding the earth’s climate sensitivity that should have every unbiased elected representative and commentator around the world asking questions about the voracity of the IPCC claims and indeed about the whole validity of the CO2 relationship to radiation and the greenhouse effect.

Simply speaking, the greenhouse theory is that heat from the sun reaches the earth’s surface and then the radiation is trapped more and more by increasing amounts of manmade CO2 and other greenhouse gases. The theory follows that increasing amounts of human-induced CO2 will lift average temperatures around the world, thereby causing significant changes to regions around the globe. This is what the term climate sensitivity refers to, being that relationship between CO2 and how it traps radiation and lifts temperatures as a result of increased CO2 and greenhouse gases. If climate sensitivity is high then the earth’s temperature reacts to solar variations, increased concentrations of greenhouse gases and other factors. If climate sensitivity is, however, low, then the earth’s temperatures do not react very much to these sorts of factors.

The question therefore becomes: how certain are we that the IPCC’s predicted greenhouse gas concentrations will cause temperatures to, as it has been suggested, rise between two and 4½ degrees? This is the big issue with the whole argument of human-induced global warming. The entire IPCC argument and links to CO2 and the Greenhouse Effect depend on high climate sensitivity. That brings me back to the importance of Richard Lindzen’s research. Using actual observations, Lindzen and his collaborator Choi have found that by examining actual observations, the amount of radiation moving back into space increases with warmer ocean temperatures. This is incredibly important because the climate models wrongly predict that when ocean temperatures rise, there is a reduced amount of radiation moving back into space. Lindzen thereby determines that instead of the 2 to 4.5-degree Celsius rise expected from the rise in CO2 and other greenhouse gases, just 0.5 of a degree can be expected. This would then help account for the absence of global warming that has occurred since 1998.

The notion that complex climate ‘catastrophes’ are simply a matter of the response of a single number, global average temperatures, to a single forcing, CO2 (or even solar forcing), represents a gigantic step backward in the science of climate. Many disasters associated with the warming are simply normal occurrences whose existence is falsely claimed to be evidence of warming. And all these examples involve phenomena that are dependent on the confluence of many factors. The willingness of the government in this place to attribute every weather event to human-induced climate change without consideration of naturally occurring cycles such as El Nino effect and the Pacific Decadal Oscillation is just incredible. If the temperature in Adelaide is 41 degrees in summer, they say...
that is human-induced climate change. If the temperature is 21, they are silent. If there is drought here, that is climate change, yet record snow and cold weather on the east coast of the United States does not seem to be mentioned.

The government’s statements on the weather are very selective and I can understand why they would be so. Milking community concerns in 2007 for all they were worth was clever politics, yet now, as more and more Australians look at what is going on around the world and begin to question what they have been told by this government, it is becoming harder to sell what the people are increasingly refusing to buy. Increasing credibility problems with the IPCCs and some of the proponents of the theory of anthropogenic global warming, together with reports of weather that is not consistent with the apocalypse predicted, has more and more Australians and other people around the world questioning what is going on.

Of course there has also been a focus on what took place at the Climatic Research Unit of the University of East Anglia. This involves allegations of concealing and destroying raw climate data, as well as targeting scientific dissent and silencing those seeking to have alternative views published. The computer system of the CRU was hacked and a number of concerning emails were made public. In just October last year well-known climate change advocate Kevin Trenberth emailed Michael Mann and other climate change advocates. When speaking of record low temperatures in parts of the United States Trenberth lamented:

The fact is that we can’t account for the lack of warming at the moment and it is a travesty that we can’t. The CERES data published in the August BAMS 09 supplement on 2008 shows there should be even more warming: but the data are surely wrong. Our observing system is inadequate.

I think what he means is that while the figures say there was not warming, the models were saying there would be. There is a bit of a reality mismatch in there. When looking at the actions of pro-anthropogenic global warming advocates, the allegations being investigated, and the inconsistencies between real weather and raw data in comparison to climate change models that are not predicting what is actually happening now, the number of questions that need to be asked is increasing, not decreasing. There is nothing settled about this science.

Some may say: ‘What does this mean? Is this the end to the theory of human induced global warming?’ I suspect not, but what is required is that this issue be seriously followed up. I call upon the government to hold a full inquiry into the science. Let us get Mann, Hansen and Jones out here. Let us hear Lindzen, Itoh, Kapitsa and others with alternative views as well. Currently, it seems that research funding favours only the human induced global warming theory. That certainly appears to be the case. All the funding is a one-way street and, in my view, that has robbed the debate of objectivity.

Speaking of objectivity, it is probably right to look at those that line up to support this ETS and a global cap-and-trade scheme. When you line them up, you are in fact lining up those with vested interests, led above all by Al Gore, whose personal fortune has greatly multiplied through his involvement in the climate change industry as evidenced by his appearance fee of US$175,000 in 2007—which I now hear is over US$300,000. Or it may be his involvement in various business interests that also greatly benefit from any cap-and-trade scheme. Another vested interest would appear to be some elements of the BBC. I read yesterday that the BBC’s pension fund is heavily invested in businesses relying on the theory of human induced global warming. The objectivity of the BBC
is therefore questioned when their, I believe, $8 billion pension fund is exposed in this matter.

It even comes down to research funding in this country where, if the research relates to climate change, your chances of getting your funding approved is greatly enhanced, if not guaranteed. I think we can expect that everyone whose employment is tied to the theory of human induced climate change is not an independent person. Similarly, all those advisers or consultants put on the staff of businesses and other organisations around the world to advise on adjusting to climate change’s proposed new laws or proposed new economies are similarly influenced beyond the realm of impartiality.

I could go on about the Head of the IPCC, Dr Pachauri, and his vested interests but it would be better to now concentrate on a plan that will actually benefit Australia through the coalition’s plan for direct action on the environment. Upfront our policy would cost $3.2 billion over four years, in direct contrast to the skewing and false influences on the economy provided by this ETS that we are debating today. Apart from the damage to jobs and the economy in general, over four years the Rudd government’s new big tax on everything will cost $40.6 billion, climbing to $114 billion over 10 years. It is outrageous that the government accuses us in matters economic. I remind the government that this nation used to have a surplus. Again we have the great tradition of Australian politics, we run surpluses on this side to pay off the debt, while the other side massively spends every dollar and borrows more. These are the great traditions of Australian politics.

In direct contrast to the tax and churn fiasco that is this great big tax on everything, we could look at the more modest yet more effective scheme that is the coalition’s policy. Firstly, there is the range of initiatives to boost solar energy use in Australia following on from the former coalition government’s initiative in solar energy: $100 million each year for an additional one million solar homes by 2020. To progress renewable energy take-ups across Australia, 125 solar projects will be established in schools and communities and there will be 25 geothermal or tidal power projects established in suitable towns.

Larger scale renewable energy generation will also be developed with a proportion of incentives provided through the renewable energy target. I also appreciate the focus and the support for research on high-voltage direct current cables. Such cables will make renewable power generation in remote places viable, allowing transmission of that power with minimal losses. It also provides options for taking away high-voltage transmission corridors such as the one that is such an eyesore between Malaga and South Ballajura in the electorate of Cowan.

The initiatives include the emissions reduction fund providing $2.5 billion to support carbon reduction activities by business and industry. This will work by using the existing reporting scheme to determine proposed emission reductions beyond base levels already determined for actual businesses. This will be the business as usual level, and businesses that go above that level will be penalised. Those businesses that reduce their emissions will be encouraged by the ability to sell those savings, their abatement, back to the government. A direct financial incentive would be provided.

Some may say, ‘What about new businesses?’ Very simply, no penalty will apply if you enter or expand the business at the industry best practice. This is how you protect jobs and not send them overseas with the ETS CPRS big new tax on everything. This is how we would, as a responsible govern-
ment, look after the best interests of our nation with understandable good policies. It is worth noting that Labor’s big tax on everything relies heavily on the purchase of CO2 emission abatements to meet their five percent reduction target. Where are the local environmental benefits here when the abatement allegedly occurs overseas?

Overall, the emissions reduction fund is about incentives rather than imposing job and productivity destroying liabilities for business. It is about incentives, as opposed to the government’s big tax on everything, which is tantamount to putting both feet firmly on the economy’s brake pedal. It is for this reason that compensation is not required. You do not have to give the cash out to families if you do not hurt them through big tax increases when every business they enter or buy from has to pass along the costs of the Rudd government’s big tax on everything.

I would also like to make mention of the very practical and effective initiative of 20 million trees to be planted in available public places. Everyone knows from their basic science lessons that trees convert CO2 to oxygen—therefore, the more the better.

I would like to remind the government that Australians are smart. They do not just accept assertions without proof. Now the government is left holding this failure of a plan—the ETS and CPRS. It is such a failure that it is no longer even your focus in Question Time as you embark upon the strategy of attacking individuals. Do not think for a second that this has not been widely noted. We will oppose these bills here for the national interest. When these bills are defeated in the Senate, I invite the Prime Minister to have a referendum on it or to call an election—whatever—and to have the courage to be prepared to explain the details. (Time expired)
for North Sydney, Joe Hockey, on 1 December last year. He said:

The Government put on the table a deal. We accepted that deal. I sought to honour that deal.

That was true of the member for North Sydney on 1 December last year. Sadly, it is not the case for the member for North Sydney today, it would seem. Certainly it is no longer the case for a majority of those opposite. It is a harsh criticism to level at anybody, and I would not level it at all those opposite, because I know there are members on the opposition benches who still hold this matter to be important, but precious few of them appear willing to actually vote according to their conscience and best judgment. When you look back on those days in November and December last year, amazingly it does seem as though the Liberal Party was hijacked by the member for O'Connor, Wilson Tuckey, and the National Party senator Barnaby Joyce. Who would have thought that possible? But that appears to have been the outcome when you look back on the events in November and December.

But let me move to the bills before the House, because they are important bills. I wish, indeed, that we could go further. I wish that there had been more progress made at Copenhagen, because I would like to have seen us, as citizens of this world and as leaders in this country, go beyond where we are at the moment. But the government has been responsible and correct in putting these bills before the parliament in the context of the various pressures, both here and abroad, that we confront.

At the core of these bills is a cap-and-trade system. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and similar schemes referred to as ETSs—emissions trading schemes—all rely on a cap-and-trade principle. I just want to outline very briefly what that means. The cap puts an upper limit on how much carbon pollution Australia can produce. The government issues a number of permits equal to that cap. The government then reduces the limit or the cap in the years ahead, reducing the amount of carbon pollution that is produced in our country. The cap takes into account a range of factors, including our international obligations, economic conditions and what other countries are doing. Once the cap has been set, large polluters that want to continue to produce carbon pollution will have to pay for the permits. Organisations can then buy and sell these permits from each other. The more carbon pollution a firm produces, the more it has to pay. The financial incentive is there for every company to produce less pollution and thereby pay less. It is a simple system. It is one that is used or being pursued by 30 countries in the world and, indeed, already a number of states in the United States of America—notably the large-economy states on the west coast—and some of the Canadian provinces.

It was a point well understood by the member for Wentworth when he spoke so eloquently in this House a couple of days ago. He said:

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.

The member for Wentworth got it right, and nearly half of those opposite agreed with him only a matter of weeks ago. Today they falsely stand in this parliament and say that this is the wrong course to follow, whereas...
only a little while ago they stood behind their then leader and supported it.

It is important to understand that by selling those permits the government will raise a substantial amount of money from the big polluters, so those who want to pollute will have to pay in order to be able to continue that pollution. The government then takes that money, under our scheme, and gives it to householders to ensure that they do not bear the brunt of increased costs.

I want to go through some of the detail of that compensation: 8.1 million Australian households—that is, nine out of 10 households in this country—will receive direct cash assistance under the CPRS package before us; 2.9 million low-income householders are going to be fully compensated; and all pensioners and carers of people with a disability are going to be compensated. Even 3.6 million middle-income households will receive direct cash assistance, and about half of those will be fully compensated. I give the example of a family earning $100,000 with a fifty-fifty income split, two children aged 10 and 13—they will receive more than full compensation. So the government takes the money from the big polluters and assures that ordinary Australians are compensated so they do not bear the cost. That is a fair, sensible, balanced, socially responsible scheme.

It is also recognised that the CPRS not only cuts emissions but helps support jobs today and into the future. It assists in creating those low-pollution jobs of the future. There is no doubt that, in the course of the next decade, the global economy is going to move in this direction. As a nation we have a choice, not just for the environmental imperatives but for the economic sense of it. We can take up the opportunities now and be at the front of that, engaging in those new industries—in the development of them, in the export of them—or we can hang around and have to face this decision in three, five, seven years down the track and end up importing those technologies from overseas. I know which one of those two options I prefer. I know which one of those two options will give my children and grandchildren the best possible chance of a high-value, decent job with a good quality of living.

The CPRS scheme provides incentives and support for businesses to get engaged in these new industries. It establishes the Climate Change Action Fund to assist small businesses to invest in those new energy efficiencies. It provides a Clean Business Australia program to help increase the energy efficiency of our buildings and large manufacturing processes. And it establishes the Australian Carbon Trust to link public and private funding to help businesses invest. Again, the member for Wentworth, just a couple of days ago, recognised this very point. He said:

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.

That very uncertainty is being fuelled by the stupidity of those opposite in adopting the negative approach to this legislation that they are. The member for Wentworth also said in that speech:

Without a clear signal on future carbon costs, these investments will not be optimised.

And that is the position that Australian businesses are in today. They need not have been in that position, had one more Liberal decided to support Mr Turnbull instead of turning their back on the future and going back to the dark ages of the past in the vote with Mr Abbott.
So who else in this debate shares the view of the government—and, until December, about half of those opposite? Support for taking action sooner rather than later is evidenced around the world. I just want to quote a couple. Many have heard of the Stern review, but I guess that, while they have heard the name ‘Stern’, they do not know who Nicholas Stern was. It is worth recording his background. Nicholas Stern was the World Bank’s chief economist. He was the head of the United Kingdom’s economic service and he was also a professor at the London School of Economics. He said many things that are compelling about the need to act early, for economic as well as environmental reasons. One of the things he said was:

... taking strong action to reduce emissions must be viewed as an investment, a cost incurred now and in the coming few decades to avoid the risks of very severe consequences in the future.

It is an investment in the future. We do need to take up that opportunity. I never thought I would quote John Howard positively on anything—but, I have to say, if you are around here long enough, just about everything comes full circle. Prior to the 2007 election even John Howard promised:

Australia will move towards a domestic emissions trading scheme—that is, a cap-and-trade system—beginning no later than 2012.

Even Tony Abbott, I might say, in October last year said:

... that’s why I think it makes sense to have an ETS.

His position in October was very different to the one he has today.

I understand there is other business before the House. I will endeavour to conclude very shortly. I just want to draw a quick comparison between the two schemes. Mr Abbott’s proposal clearly does not work in dealing with carbon pollution. It does not place any cap on carbon pollution. Indeed, the assessments in the last week by experts in the department show it increases pollution. It slugs taxpayers instead of the big polluters, so it is the taxpayers who are going to have to pay the bill to fund this money that is going to be handed out to the big end of town. Indeed, it is unfunded, so we do not know whether that money that is going to be given to the big end of town is going to come from cutting school or health funding, whether it is going to come from increased taxes or whether it is going to come from some combination of those.

I began by saying there are few bills that come before this parliament that are of such importance and significance. In the years to come many people, our children and our grandchildren, will ask us what our position was and what we did to address this matter. I very strongly support the package of bills before the House. I urge those opposite to reconsider their stance. I regret that circumstances of the House do not allow me to continue further. I support the bills.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (10.58 am)—I move:

That the question be now put.

Question put.

The House divided. [11.03 am]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr S Georganas)

Ayes.………… 76

Noes.……… 58

Majority……… 18

AYES

Thursday, 11 February 2010

In division—

Mr Ciobo—Mr Deputy Speaker, can I have the call? The Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing came in after the doors were locked!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I can’t see behind me and I will not make a decision when people come in.

Mr Ciobo—Mr Deputy Speaker, I have a point of order. Can you clarify your ruling that if you don’t see it, it’s fine?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There are attendants at the doors.

Mr Hunt—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a moment of indulgence—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I remind the member for Sturt that there is no debate. The question is that the bill be now read a second time.

A division having been called and the bells having been rung—

Mrs Vale—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During the debate on the workplaces legislation of the previous government, members of the opposition who had not spoken were allowed to have their speeches recorded in Hansard. I seek your guidance on how we could allow certain members on our side of the House who have not yet spoken to do the same.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Geoganas)—The House ordered that we go straight to the vote. As far as I am concerned,
that is the end of it. You can raise the matter later on through the Speaker, or I could raise it with the Speaker on your behalf.

Mrs Vale—I would be grateful if you did.

Original question put:

That this bill be now read a second time

The House divided. [11.11 am]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr S Georganas)

Ayes......... 79
Noes......... 57

Majority....... 22

AYES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R. Bidgood, J.
Bird, S. Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J. Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S. Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M. Campbell, J.
Champion, N. Cheeseman, D.L.
Clare, J.D. Combet, G.
Crean, S.F. D’Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M. Debuis, B.
Dreyfus, M.A. Elliot, J.
Ellis, A.L. Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A. Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J. Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P. Gillard, J.E.
Gibbons, S.W. Griffin, A.P.
Grierson, S.J. Hall, J.G. *
Hale, D.F. Irwin, J.
Hayes, C.P. * Irwin, J.
Jackson, S.M. Kelly, M.J.
Kerr, D.J.C. King, C.F.
Livermore, K.F. King, C.F.
McClelland, R.B. Macklin, J.L.
Melham, D. McKew, M.
Neal, B.J. Murphy, J.
O’Connor, B.P. Neumann, S.K.
Owens, J. Neumann, S.K.
Perrett, G.D. Oakeshott, R.J.M.
Price, L.R.S. Parke, M.
Rea, K.M. Plibersek, T.
Rishworth, A.L. Pliibersek, T.
Rudd, K.M. Raguse, B.B.
Shorten, W.R. Ripoll, B.F.
Smith, S.F. Roxon, N.L.
Sullivan, J. Saffin, J.A.

SYMON, M. TANNER, L.
Trevor, C. THOMSON, K.J.
Turnour, J.P. TURNBULL, M.
Zappia, A. VAMVAKINOU, M.

NOES

Abbott, A.J. Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F. Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I. Broadart, R.
Chester, D. Ciobo, S.M.
Coulton, M. Dutton, P.C.
Farmer, P.F. Fletcher, P.
Forrest, J.A. * Gash, J.
Haase, B.W. HARTSUYKER, L.
Hawke, A. Hawker, D.P.M.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Jensen, D. Johnson, M.A. *
Katter, R.C. Keenan, M.
Laming, A. Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J. Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B. Markus, L.E.
Mirabella, S. Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E. O’Dwyer, K.
Pyne, C. Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J. Robb, A.
Robert, S.R. Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A. Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. Simpkins, L.
Sliper, P.N. Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M. Southcott, A.J.
Stone, S.N. Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W. Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J. Windsor, A.H.C.
Wood, J. * denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Mr Pyne—Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek your indulgence.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is it a point of order?

Mr Pyne—I intend to ask you for your indulgence because I did not wish to during the shemozzle that was the—
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There is no indulgence during this session.

Mr Pyne—You can come back to this matter, or we can either deal with this the nice way or deal with it the difficult way. How would you like to deal with it?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! I ask the member for Sturt to be seated.

Mr Pyne—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. How can you have any confidence in the vote that you have just taken when you have not dealt with the points of order raised during the division from this side of the House about the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Deputy Prime Minister barging through the door—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will resume his seat. I did hear the points of order—

Mr Pyne—You did not deal with the points of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—and I made a ruling. Therefore, I ask the member for Sturt to be seated.

Mr Pyne—As a consequence—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I warn the member for Sturt! Is leave granted for the member for Lyne to move his amendments? Leave granted.

Mr OAKESHOTT—I move amendments (1) to (11):

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 2), omit “Australian”, substitute “Independent”.

(2) Clause 5, page 7, line 16, omit “Australian”, substitute “Independent”.

(3) Page 38 (before line 2), before subclause 14(5), insert:

(4A) In making a recommendation to the Governor-General about regulations to be made for the purposes of this section, the Minister must first request draft regulations from the Authority.

(4B) The Minister must give the Authority reasonable time in which to prepare the draft regulations.

(4C) If the Minister receives draft regulations from the Authority within reasonable time, the Minister must recommend them to the Governor-General.

(4) Clause 14, page 38 (lines 2 to 4), omit “In making a recommendation to the Governor-General about regulations to be made for the purposes of this section, the Minister:”; substitute “If the Minister does not receive draft regulations from the Authority within reasonable time, then, in making a recommendation to the Governor-General about regulations to be made for the purposes of this section, the Minister:”;

(5) Page 40 (before line 2), before subclause 15(4), insert:

(3A) In making a recommendation to the Governor-General about regulations to be made for the purposes of this section, the Minister must first request draft regulations from the Authority.

(3B) The Minister must give the Authority reasonable time in which to prepare the draft regulations.

(3C) If the Minister receives draft regulations from the Authority within reasonable time, the Minister must recommend them to the Governor-General.

(6) Clause 15, page 40 (lines 2 to 4), omit “In making a recommendation to the Governor-
General about regulations to be made for the purposes of this section, the Minister:” and insert “If the Minister does not receive draft regulations from the Authority within reasonable time, then, in making a recommendation to the Governor-General about regulations to be made for the purposes of this section, the Minister:”

(7) Clause 165, page 214 (line 1) to clause 173C, page 223 (line 4), omit Part 8.
(8) Clause 174, page 240 (line 1) to clause 189D, page 278 (line 12), omit Part 9.
(9) Clause 282, page 430 (lines 5 to 6), omit “the Minister must, by written notice given to the Authority, direct the Authority to” substitute “the Authority must”.
(10) Clause 282, page 430 (lines 10 to 11), delete paragraph 282(3)(d).
(11) Clause 360, page 506 (after line 20), after subsection 360(5), insert:

(5A) A person is not eligible for appointment as an expert advisory committee member unless the Minister has obtained written approval for that person from all members of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts, or whichever House of Representatives Standing Committee most closely resembles this function.

I will not speak for a long because, in essence, I do not think it really matters.

**Government and Opposition members interjecting—**

**Mr OAKESHOTT**—Hang on. Two nights ago, I called the death of this CPRS legislation—RIP the CPRS—because of a pox on both sides in regard to the lack of a sales pitch and the lack of timely information into the community throughout 2009. The pubs and barbecues have been lost by the government in this debate and it is to their shame. When all this is left and buried deep in the bowels of the Senate, I hope there is some review, some consideration and some navel-gazing by the government as to what went wrong and why there was so much silence throughout 2009. Likewise—

**Opposition member interjecting—**

**Mr OAKESHOTT**—I think it does not matter because we have seen two very clear, different positions in the last three months from the opposition—a side that now has on the table an emissions trading scheme based on GGAS in New South Wales. The second line on their website says, ‘It is the first mandatory emissions trading scheme in the world.’ That is the basis of their scheme. They are not being truthful to the people of Australia in promoting that. They have a market based response and they are pretending it is something different. This debate is going to die. It is a sad death because the concept of a market based response in a market economy, putting a price on carbon and putting true pricing into the energy sector, is a sensible way forward for the national interest of this country.

The amendments I move this morning work on the detail of the bill. This is the third time these same amendments have been put up. It is of concern, on the slight chance this legislation hits the ground and gets through, that there is an enormous amount of ministerial discretion left in this legislation. When it comes to the crunch on how a particular issue is going to be dealt with, it is left as a question of ministerial discretion, I think, 25 times in this bill.

To the minister, whoever that minister may be in the future, I say: who wants to be the person in the chair having to make a decision to remove a lot of these transitional elements in the legislation—for example, fuel credits? Who is going to be the person, man or woman, sitting in the chair who is going to say: ‘I remove fuel credits. Come on Australia, come and enjoy my company’? It is not going to happen. We have to remove the political elements of this. We have to
make sure the science is true, the science is supported and the science is allowed to fly. The way to do that is to remove the political elements of this and the amount of ministerial discretion, and to try and instil, as we have with so many other elements of government, an independent element in this process. We did it with the Reserve Bank. We consider the economy so pure and so important that we have an independent Reserve Bank board. If this is the moral challenge of our time then we should instil independence, arm’s length from government, in this process. At the moment, we do not have that. It is wrapped up in ministerial discretion in the future. It is a lesser bill because of that. I do not think it really matters, but I hope the government considers this third time round.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.20 am)—I thank the member for Lyne for his amendments. As he indicated, he has moved them in the past and we have had some dialogue about these matters on previous occasions. First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that he has remained very actively and positively engaged in this debate throughout, and is a supporter of immediate and comprehensive action on climate change. That is something that the government respects.

The amendments that the member for Lyne move go to a number of matters: advice in relation to scheme caps—amendments (3) to (6); removal of assistance for emissions-intensive trade-exposed industries—amendment (7); removal of coal fired electricity generation assistance—amendment (8); voluntary cancellation of Australian emissions units—amendments (9) and (10); and the appointment of expert advisory committee members—amendment (11).

The government does not support these amendments. Broadly, for the reasons that I have outlined on previous occasions, in relation to which I am sure the member for Lyne is now well familiar, the government believes that we have the relationship between the responsibilities of the Australian Climate Change Regulatory Authority and the responsibilities of the minister and executive government in balance in an appropriate way in the legislation. Broadly, without going to further detail in relation to those issues, since I have dealt with it on previous occasions, the government’s position is unchanged and we do not support the amendments.

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (11.22 am)—As we have asserted now for several days in debate, in our view this bill remains deeply flawed. It will put Australia well ahead of the world. It will expose industry, and therefore jobs and the livelihoods of millions of Australians, unnecessarily to great risks. These amendments in no way address the fundamental flaws that exist in the bill, and as such we will not be supporting these amendments.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—As there are no further speakers, I put the question. The question is that the amendments be agreed to. All those in favour say aye; to the contrary say no. The noes have it. The question now is that the bill be agreed to. All those in favour say aye; to the contrary say no.

Mr Oakeshott—The question is that the amendments be agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—No, we have done the amendments. You need two voices for a division to be required.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The question is that the bill be agreed to. All those in favour say aye; to the contrary say no. The ayes have it. The member for Lyne.
Mr Oakeshott—Without questioning your ruling, I think you are obliged to at least ask whether a division is required when there are two voices saying yes to the amendments.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—When the question was originally put there was only one voice. We moved on from there.

Opposition member interjecting—Two!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Originally there was one voice. We can backtrack. The member for New England is on his feet.

Mr Windsor—It was an echo.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for New England is now in his appropriate seat.

Mr Windsor—I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I did say aye but I am a quietly spoken person and you probably did not hear it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The question now is that the bill be agreed to. All those in favour say—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—We will go back. The question now is that the bill be agreed to. All those in favour say aye, and to the contrary say no. Is a division required? Ring the bells.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member for Lyne has the call.

Mr Oakeshott—Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just to go over the last couple of minutes, my understanding was that with two voices on the question of—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Given the confusion and the heat of the previous division, I think we are slightly confused about where we are, so I will backtrack.

Mr Oakeshott—Thank you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I am going to your amendments and I am now asking you whether you seek to have a division on your amendments.

Mr Oakeshott—Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The question is that the member for Lyne’s amendments be agreed to.

A division having been called and the bells having been rung—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—As there are fewer than five members on the side for the ayes, I declare the question resolved in the negative in accordance with standing order 127. The names of those members who are in the minority will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Question negatived, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Windsor and Mr Katter voting aye.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.32 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010

Second Reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.
Third Reading

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.34 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

AUSTRALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATORY AUTHORITY BILL 2010

Second Reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.35 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CHARGES—CUSTOMS) BILL 2010

Second Reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.37 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CHARGES—GENERAL) BILL 2010

Second Reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.39 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CPRS FUEL CREDITS) BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by Mr Combet:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading
Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.40 am)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME (CPRS FUEL CREDITS) (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by Mr Combet:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading
Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.41 am)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

EXCISE TARIFF AMENDMENT (CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME) BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by Mr Combet:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading
Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.42 am)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME) BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by Mr Combet:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading
Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.42 am)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.
CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION
SCHEME AMENDMENT
(HOUSEHOLD ASSISTANCE)
BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 February, on motion by Mr Combet:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading
Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change) (11.44 am)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY
AMENDMENT (BACKGROUND
CHECKING) BILL 2009
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 19 November 2009, on motion by Ms Roxon:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (11.45 am)—I rise today to speak on the National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009. Security sensitive biological agents, whilst important in medical, health and scientific research, do pose a significant risk to human health. Bacterial and viral pathogens and toxins derived from living organisms have the potential to do untold damage through unintentional release, lax handling or, worse, malicious intent. With Ebola virus, the plague, SARS and anthrax listed in tier 1 of recognised SSBA’s, the threat is all too apparent. It is important that regulation relating to SSBA’s is effective, consistent and provides appropriate safeguards in the interests of national security. The coalition government initiated important reforms in this area in 2002. The bill before us today is consequential to those reforms.

An agreement was reached at COAG in 2002 for a national review of the regulation, security and management of the storage, sale and handling of SSBA’s. Following the 2002 COAG agreement, the coalition government provided an investment in national health security capability in the budget of 2004. Through the budget measure, the coalition strengthened national health security, preparedness and response capability in the event of a national health emergency or terrorist attack. The budget measure included provisions for a national register of laboratories that use or store high-risk pathogens and toxins. In 2007, COAG agreed to the recommendations of the report on the regulation and control of biological agents. The report analysed the effectiveness of Australia’s existing regulation of SSBA’s and ASIO’s assessment of threats to Australian institutions and entities storing and handling high-risk biological agents. Accordingly, COAG agreed to a nationally consistent scheme to regulate all aspects of the supply chain for SSBA’s.

The National Health Security Act, which this bill seeks to amend, was introduced by then health minister, Tony Abbott. The scheme introduced under the National Health Security Act aimed to ensure that national health security was maximised whilst minimising the regulatory and administrative burden on affected institutions. The National Health Security Act targeted security risks by consolidating the regulation and monitoring of facilities that handle SSBA’s across all jurisdictions. The risks identified as a result of a lack of nationally consistent legislation included: the limited physical security re-
quirements for facilities and entities holding SSBAs; lack of monitoring of the location, nature or destruction of SSBAs; no requirement for checking of facility and entity employees with access to SSBAs to ensure that they did not have criminal or terrorist links; and facilities and entities did not uniformly record access to SSBAs. The National Health Security Act addressed these risks.

In relation to the bill before us today, section 35 of the National Health Security Act provides for the minister by legislative instrument to set requirements relating to the security status of individuals who are entitled to handle or dispose of SSBAs. This bill explicitly provides that the minister may require background checks in setting those requirements for individuals involved in handling or disposing of such biological agents. The bill further provides that background checks be conducted under AusCheck for individuals who handle or dispose of SSBAs. AusCheck is a division of the Attorney-General’s Department and has been responsible for background criminal and security checks on applicants for aviation security identification cards and maritime security identification cards. The AusCheck Amendment Bill 2009 sought to expand the range of background checks that AusCheck was authorised to undertake. The original expansion was to include matters related to: Australia’s national security; the defence of Australia; a national emergency; the prevention of terrorism offences; and executive power of the Commonwealth. A Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry recommended, amongst other things, that, in order for AusCheck to conduct background checks for individuals, there must be provisions made in the principal act. The coalition also noted the concerns of the committee in relation to the lack of consultation by the Rudd government prior to the proposed expansion of AusCheck’s role. The government subsequently amended the AusCheck bill to account for the committee’s recommendations. The bill today complies with the Senate committee’s recommendation and the subsequent amendment to the AusCheck bill for authorisation for such background checks to be included in the principal act—in this case, the National Health Security Act.

Under the AusCheck regulations, where the secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department makes an assessment that a background check should include information about a person’s unfavourable criminal history, the secretary must give the individual written notice about the substance of the unfavourable criminal history advice and give the individual an opportunity to make representations to the secretary on or before the day mentioned in the notice, or at a later day nominated under subregulation. The regulations also provide for an individual about whom advice of the outcome of a background check contains unfavourable criminal history to apply to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for review of the decision.

I note the minister’s statement that the details of the SBA background-checking scheme will also be set out in the SBA Standards and will be subject to further consultation. Background checking for individuals involved in handling and disposing of SSBAs is consistent with the intention of the National Health Security reform process. The coalition accepts there has been substantial consultation throughout this process. The coalition supports measures which provide sensible safeguards to human health and the environment as provided for in this bill.

Ms Campbell (Bass) (11.52 am)—I speak today on the National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009, which amends the National Health Security Act 2007—the NHS Act—to en-
hance Australia’s controls on certain biological agents that could be used as weapons. The regulatory scheme for security sensitive biological agents, SSBAs, currently includes stringent requirements relating to the notification of the type and location of SSBAs, along with standards that must be met by organisations, such as laboratories, handling SSBAs. Standards may also set requirements for the security status of personnel who handle SSBAs.

Since the passage of the NHS Act in September 2007 extensive consultation has been undertaken with stakeholders to develop requirements in the standards relating to the security status of persons who handle or dispose of SSBAs. Stakeholders have been consulted on the need for background checking of persons who handle or dispose of SSBAs and on the proposal that the checks be conducted by the Australian Background Checking Service of the Attorney-General’s Department, otherwise known as AusCheck. The legislative framework for AusCheck to provide background checks under the SSBBA standards was included in the AusCheck Amendment Bill 2009, which was introduced into parliament during the 2009 autumn sittings.

That bill was referred to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee in May 2009. The Senate committee recommended that no background checking scheme could be established under the AusCheck legislation in the absence of another act of parliament providing for the establishment of such a scheme. The proposed change made by this bill has arisen because of the Senate committee’s recommendation and is simply to enable a principal act, in this case the NHS Act, to authorise the establishment of a background checking scheme, to be conducted by AusCheck, to be used for screening individuals who handle or dispose of SSBAs.

The proposed change will clarify that, in determining the requirements in a standard relating to the security status of individuals who handle or dispose of SSBAs, the minister may require background checks. The background checks will be conducted under the AusCheck scheme. The proposed change will align with the amendments proposed by the AusCheck Amendment Bill 2009. The amendments will enable the AusCheck regulations to provide for a scheme relating to the conduct and coordination of background checks by AusCheck where another act has expressly provided for the making of a legislative instrument requiring a background check of an individual to be conducted under the AusCheck scheme.

The proposed SSBBA background checking scheme has been the subject of consultation with agencies responsible for obtaining and assessing information about the risks and threats posed by biological agents—such as ASIO and other intelligence agencies, public and animal health laboratories, state and territory government agencies, and other experts in SSBAs.

I am confident that the bill addresses concerns of stakeholders and ensures that we continue to deliver on our international commitments and the national imperative to actively improve our capacity to maintain adequate controls on biological agents. This bill ensures that people handling biological agents that could be used for terrorist attacks will face new background checks that ultimately could save lives.

I agree with the federal Minister for Health and Ageing that these changes will enhance Australia’s capacity to secure biological agents of diseases such as anthrax, smallpox and the plague, which are known as security sensitive biological agents or SSBAs. I believe there are already stringent requirements covering such agents; however,
these new measures enable the federal health minister to determine that background checking of people who handle SSBAs is conducted by the Australian Background Checking Service, or AusCheck, of the Attorney-General’s Department. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MARKUS (Greenway) (11.57 am)—I rise to speak on the National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009 and, as we would all be aware, this is an important issue to our electorates, particularly to the national health security system. Every day Australians rely on our health system to function and having the health system function efficiently is very important. In my own electorate we have challenges with hospitals and other health services. It is important that hospitals and health services are provided with adequate funding. In closing, I would just like to say that this is a very important issue that all Australians will be focusing on.

Debate (on motion by Mr Albanese) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Indigenous Affairs

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (11.59 am)—by leave—I acknowledge the First Australians on whose land we meet, and whose cultures we celebrate as one of the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

Two years ago I made a formal apology in this parliament to the Indigenous peoples of Australia, and particularly to the stolen generations, on behalf of the government, the parliament and the people of Australia. On that day in 2008, I also pledged to lead a new, national effort to close the gap in life expectancy and life opportunities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. On that day, we achieved for the first time a bipartisan commitment to closing the gap:

- together, we acknowledged the failure of successive governments to deliver to many Indigenous communities across Australia;
- together, we demonstrated that closing the gap is a national priority that should be above partisan politics, and
- together, we recognised that closing the gap would take not a parliamentary term, but a generation.

When we came to government the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life expectancy at birth was estimated at 17 years. Indigenous children in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory were 3.6 times more likely to die before they reached the age of five than non-Indigenous children. Almost one in 10 dwellings in remote and very remote Indigenous communities were in need of major repair or replacement.

In 2006, only 47.4 per cent of Indigenous young people had attained year 12 or equivalent. And the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians aged 15 to 64 stood at around 21 percentage points in 2008. In other areas, such as literacy and numeracy, comparable national data did not exist, though a large gap in achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students was evident.

These failures present us with a substantial challenge. But in facing this challenge, I believe there has never before been the commitment across our country at large to change that we have today. We have seen a growing movement to take responsibility for change—among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. If we are to make a break from the failures of the past, we must all play our part. Governments, first, must take responsibility for addressing their past failures in Indigenous affairs.
• Second, Indigenous Australians must take greater responsibility for change—change begins in the lives of individuals and families, spreading across local communities.

• Third, Australians across all walks of life must take responsibility for resetting relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

**Second closing the gap statement**

Today I table my second annual statement on closing the gap. Since the parliament made the apology two years ago, the Australian government has reached, for the first time, a national agreement with all state and territory governments on closing the gap. For the first time, rather than pulling in different directions, we are pulling in the same direction. For the first time, there is a national investment of $4.6 billion. And for the first time, we are setting common goals to transform the health, education and employment outcomes of Indigenous Australians.

For the first time, governments agreed to six clear targets, which work together to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians over the generation. We set these targets knowing that they were ambitious. We know that meeting them will not be easy. Generations of Indigenous disadvantage cannot be turned around overnight. We know it will need unprecedented effort by all parts of the Australian community. But there is no greater social challenge facing Australia than closing this yawning gap. And today I can report to the House that, on the ground, we are seeing the beginnings of change.

The report I table today outlines a slow path to change. It demonstrates the challenges of accurate data—to track our progress to closing the gap and thereby meet our targets. But it also demonstrates that, while progress is slow, there is action in communities right across Australia: action by governments, action by Indigenous communities and action by the wider Australian community.

**Progress against the closing the gap targets**

I will now address each of the six targets we set in 2008. The government’s first target is to halve the mortality gap between Indigenous children and other children under five years of age by 2018. In 2008, the gap in child mortality meant that 205 out of any 100,000 Indigenous children died before the age of five, compared to 100 non-Indigenous children—a difference of more than 100. Indigenous children are twice as likely to die before the age of five than non-Indigenous kids. This is a shameful statistic. For all parents, it is shocking and confronting.

While 2009 data to measure progress against this target is not yet available, other data sources can provide some measure of change. We know that the gap in infant mortality rates in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory has been on the decline over the past decade. This decline has been particularly evident over recent years and now stands at 5.3 percentage points. We must continue to act to see this decline accelerated and our target reached by 2018. Towards that goal, we have already rolled out 40 new services for mothers and babies.

Under the $90.3 million Mothers and Babies Services program, a total of 11,000 mothers and babies will be supported over five years, with services including improved antenatal and postnatal care, advice on nutrition and health checks. And today I can announce that nine new services will be funded, including at:

• the Laynhapuy Homelands Association and the Pintubi Homelands Health Service in the Northern Territory;
at the Tullawon Health Service in South Australia;
- at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre;
- at the Wirraka Maya Health Service in Western Australia; and
- at Mookai Rosie Bi-Bayan in Queensland.

In addition to these services,
- The Australian government is supporting pregnant women to improve their own health through establishing five sites under the $37.4 million Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program.

We have provided a total of 390 ear, nose and throat specialist services and a total of 1,990 dental services to 1,429 children who live in the Northern Territory Emergency Response communities in the six months from July to December last year alone.

And the Red Cross is working with Outback Stores to bring more fresh fruit to Indigenous kids in the Territory through breakfast clubs in remote areas, in 33 communities and 13 homeland centres.

Our second target is to provide access to early childhood education for all four-year olds in remote Indigenous communities within five years. Getting the best start in life begins early. Early childhood education is essential to getting the right start in learning and preparing for school. But the best available data shows only around 60 per cent of Indigenous children are enrolled in an early childhood education program in the year before school, compared to around 70 per cent of all children.

The good news is that the trend is in the right direction—more Indigenous children are being enrolled. And we are seeing the fastest preschool enrolment growth in remote communities, increasing by 31 per cent between 2005 and 2008. We are expanding early learning opportunities for Indigenous children through the establishment of 36 children and family centres bringing together important services including child care, early learning and parent and family support programs. Twenty-one of these 36 centres will be located in regional and remote areas, including in Kununurra in Western Australia; Mornington Island in Queensland; and Walgett in New South Wales. Another will be located in Yuendumu in the Northern Territory, where the Yuendumu Early Childhood Centre is already held up as a model of successful early childhood education.

Every day between 40 and 60 children, along with their parents and extended family, go along to that centre to paint, read books, ride bikes and play. The children have breakfast and lunch there, the community nurse visits and they go on excursions to the pool and into the bush. The 14 local Aboriginal child care workers who look after them say the children are healthy and happy. And with more children benefiting from early childhood education, the flow-on effect will help us meet our third and fourth targets.

These targets are as follows: to halve the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students within a decade; and to halve the gap between Indigenous and non-indigenous students in rates of year 12 attainment or an equivalent attainment by 2020. These two targets are critical to closing the gap, because it is education, above all, that will improve the life chances and unlock the potential for Indigenous Australians.

The evidence here is unambiguous. Finishing year 12 transforms students future opportunities. It builds pathways to more secure, better paid and more fulfilling jobs. The learning basics—literacy and numeracy—are fundamental to all children.
And they are critical to healthier, happier and longer lives. The evidence shows the gap in meeting literacy and numeracy standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is large. These gaps are evident from as early as year 3—with the largest gap in 2008 being 29.4 percentage points for year 5 reading. Literacy and numeracy scores vary across grades; in 2009 there was an improvement in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students reading for years 3, 5 and 7. For year 9 students, the gap slightly increased.

The government is taking action to expand opportunities for Indigenous children at school. Around 78,000 Indigenous students—almost half of all Indigenous primary and secondary school students—will benefit from the government’s $1.5 billion investment in 1,500 low socioeconomic schools, as well as substantial investments in literacy and numeracy. And we are seeing great results from the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program of Dr Chris Sarra whose ‘clear expectations, high expectations’ philosophy for educating Indigenous children is delivering remarkable results among the 44 schools signed up to it.

The government provided Stronger Smarter Learning Communities in September 2009 to support an initial 12 ‘hub’ schools in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. We expect this to grow to 60 hub schools over the next four years, supporting between 180 and 240 affiliated schools. One primary school that has already signed up is the East Kalgoorlie Primary School in Western Australia. Faced with what she described as significant challenges, Principal Donna Bridge used her experience of the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program to enlist the support of parents and the community to bring about change. Five years later, attitudes have changed, school attendance is up and there have been significant improvements in literacy and numeracy. But there is a long way to go.

In Cape York in Far North Queensland, school attendance is also up, driven by the Cape York Welfare Reforms—created by Indigenous leader Noel Pearson and supported by the Commonwealth and state governments. Under the reforms welfare payments are linked to parents taking responsibility to care for their kids and make sure they go to school. In Aurukun, one community in the trial, school attendance rose from 44 to 66 per cent last year while in Coen it was 93 per cent—two points higher than the state average. This is a good achievement.

The number of Indigenous students achieving a year 12 or equivalent attainment is improving only over the long term. In 2006, only 47.4 per cent of Indigenous 20- to 24-year-olds had attained a year 12 or equivalent qualification, almost half as many as non-Indigenous young people. Indigenous school retention rates from the start of high school to year 12 have risen from 30.7 per cent in 1995 to 46.5 per cent in 2008, a 6.4 percentage point increase. With concerted government effort and the contribution of organisations like the Clontarf Foundation we are working to close the gap.

Clontarf’s school based sport academies are tackling poor attendance and outcomes among Indigenous students through sport and recreation—with some great results, including school attendance rates of more than 80 per cent and improved academic performance. By the end of February, 2,300 students in 36 schools across three states will be signed up. Clontarf is one of the academies funded through the Australian government’s Sporting Chance Program, to support Indigenous students engagement with school. Overall, the programs have achieved an average attendance rate of 79 per cent—six
percentage points above the average rate for all Indigenous students in the schools.

So I am pleased to announce today that in 2010 an additional 17 sports academies will commence operation across Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria. This will support about 1,000 students, and will bring the total number of students within this program to some 10,000 students. Ten of these new academies will be for girls. The new academies will be established in Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Bunbury and North Albany, in Western Australia; West Arnhem, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory; Mooroopna, Bendigo and Ballarat in Victoria; and Townsville in Queensland. As well, the Clontarf Foundation will operate seven new football academies in Jabiru and Gunbalanya in the Northern Territory; and in Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Swan Hill, Robinvale and Mildura in Victoria.

Our fifth target is to halve within a decade the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians. On this goal, there is a positive trend. Between 2002 and 2008, the Indigenous employment rate rose from 48 per cent to 53.8 per cent. This is still well below the non-Indigenous employment rate so that in 2008, the most recent available data indicates there was a 21 percentage point gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment.

Over the past year, we have replaced Community Development Employment Project jobs with more than 1,500 jobs delivering government services to Indigenous communities. These, for the first time, are now sustainable, proper jobs. The best way to accelerate growth in indigenous employment is to give people the skills both to get a job and to keep a job. Seven schools in the 29 remote communities targeted under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery already have trades training centres under our $2.5 billion national investment in trade training centres to give school students early opportunities to develop skills for a profession in the trades, and to help them complete year 12 or an equivalent qualification.

But others can still benefit. In communities like Hermannsburg, dedicated teachers have lifted school attendance to better than 90 per cent in junior school. To be successful, these young people need to be actively engaged beyond their primary school years. The government is acting today to improve access to first-rate education facilities for students in remote Indigenous communities. I announce today that intensive support and assistance will be delivered to schools from the 29 remote service delivery priority locations that have not already had funding from the trades training centres program. Schools in remote communities with large Indigenous student populations will also be provided with extra flexibility to deliver training targeted at the needs and education levels in these communities, including pre-vocational and certificate I and certificate II qualifications.

We are also working with the private sector to create real business and employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians, and I thank the private sector for their engagement. The government is also investing $3 million to support the new Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council, which helps certified Indigenous businesses to win new contracts in the private and government sectors. After only five months, the council has signed up 31 major corporations as backers.

Already, it has helped secure $3.3 million worth of contracts for 15 Indigenous businesses. To encourage businesses across Australia to take action to close the gap on In-
digenous disadvantage, we have appointed a government ambassador for business action. This position has been filled by Colin Carter, a highly regarded Australian businessman, who was a founding partner of Boston Consulting Group in Australia, and who has more recently served as the Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. Mr Carter will work with Australian businesses to promote the employment of Indigenous people, and to encourage business people to share their skills with Indigenous communities to help set up and grow their own businesses. These efforts are in addition to the work of the Australian Employment Covenant, through which some 16,000 Indigenous jobs have been committed over the coming years from Australian business.

All these efforts culminate in our sixth and final target—to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. As of today we are informed that the life expectancy gap is 11.5 years for men and 9.7 for women. An Indigenous male born today is likely to die at just 67 years of age, and an Indigenous female at 73 years of age. This is less than the 17-year gap that we thought existed a year ago. This is good news—but it is the result of having more reliable data, rather than the result of any real improvement on the ground. That is the truth of it. In the past, we have not had reliable information on Indigenous life expectancy. So we have not reliably known the size of the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Australia.

There is evidence to suggest that some progress may have been made. But the progress is clearly too slow. Closing the life expectancy gap is a cumulative target, relying on our success in meeting each of the other targets for achievement. Obviously, the health of Indigenous people is a major factor. Tobacco, obesity and physical inactivity are the leading risk factors, accounting for more than 45 per cent of the total health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Since 2007-08, Indigenous-specific health spending has increased by 57 per cent. This includes nearly $1.6 billion over four years to fight treatable chronic diseases that account for two-thirds of premature Indigenous deaths. And it includes the $14.5 million Indigenous Tobacco Control Initiative, a package of 20 innovative antismoking projects in urban, regional and remote Indigenous communities.

**Australian government leadership**

I spoke earlier about the legacy of decades of government failure still endured by Indigenous Australians—governments of both political persuasions. This makes it all the more urgent to be vigilant about what is working and what is not working. That is why, when evidence emerged of unacceptable delays in our major Indigenous housing program in the Northern Territory last year, the government took action to get the program on track. That action is delivering results. As a result, we remain on target to build 750 new houses, and rebuild or refurbish another 2½ thousand in remote Indigenous communities by 2013—through the Australian government working together with the government of the Northern Territory.

It is in that spirit that we have instructed the COAG Reform Council to produce an annual assessment of the performance of governments—plural—against the closing of the gap targets. We have also appointed a Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services to oversee the rollout of local plans in 29 remote communities and to cut through the red tape that slows delivery on the ground. In the coordinator general’s first six-monthly report, released in December last
year, he identified that ‘business-as-usual’ approaches were still too widespread. He noted that fragmentation and siloing may act as a barrier to achieve improvements in service delivery necessary to close the gap.

And, to that end, I can announce today a new flexible funding pool to free up funds for remote service delivery and ensure that red tape does not get in the way of progress within these communities. Local initiative is fundamentally important to making these initiatives work. This funding pool will target high priority projects in the 29 Indigenous communities that are the initial priority of the national partnership agreement. The $46 million for this funding pool over the next three years will allow the government to respond flexibly and quickly to the Indigenous community’s needs and to act on local implementation plans.

We are not just making unprecedented investments in Indigenous communities; we are also seeking to do things differently. For example, central to our $5.5 billion investment in remote Indigenous housing is our target of 20 per cent Indigenous employment. In the Northern Territory, Indigenous employment is currently running at 35 per cent, providing jobs for more than 100 Aboriginal people across the Territory. One of them is 24-year-old Tiwi Islander Harry Munkara who is building houses in the community of Nguiu. Harry is a carpenter and, with overtime, he is earning around $800 a week. I am informed Harry told the Australian newspaper this week that for the first time he was managing to save money to put aside for his toddler son. That is good news. And, Harry says, he wants to be a role model for his people. That is also good news.

After some early difficulties in the housing construction program, houses are now beginning to roll out. Over 50 new houses are now under construction in the Northern Territory, with the keys to the first two houses handed over to tenants this week. Refurbishments are being made to around 80 homes that were in very poor repair. And more than 70 have already been completed and handed back to the Northern Territory government for allocation to Indigenous families. In total, under the Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership, work has commenced on over 150 new houses across the country. Fifteen of these have been completed. Around half of the 240 refurbishments that have started on existing homes in poor condition have also been completed.

To ensure that our investments in remote communities bear fruit on the ground, we are seeking a fundamental change in the way housing is delivered. We are insisting that the states and the Northern Territory obtain secure tenure for housing so that the government has security over the land. In the past, the communal nature of Aboriginal land made it unclear who was responsible for maintaining houses and other structures built on that land. But we have matched an unprecedented investment with tenancy reform to ensure the residents pay rent and care for their homes—that is our objective.

Indigenous people in public housing, like other public housing tenants across the country, will have standard tenancy arrangements in place and the state and territory governments will be responsible for maintaining those houses. We are acquiring security over land so that housing and essential services can be built for the long term, so private companies can feel comfortable about investing and so that homeownership can become possible. Many Indigenous communities—including 14 in the Northern Territory—have shown a willingness to sign long-term new leases and obtain significant new investments.
With secure tenure obtained over all 18 Alice Springs town camps, we have put our $150 million Alice Springs Transformation Plan into action. We are cleaning up the camps, controlling the number of dogs and introducing new alcohol counselling services, and this month we start building new houses. This is slow, hard and difficult work. The 60 to 100 residents of one town camp—Ilpeye Ilpeye—have made clear their aspirations to own their own homes. So the Australian government has changed the tenure of this land from community lease to freehold title. This means the land can be subdivided into individual housing blocks. Over time, that means members of this community can own their own homes. This is a good thing. Communities with strong social norms give families the incentives to take responsibility for their lives and build a better future for themselves.

No family can function in overcrowded, derelict houses in which stoves and taps do not work, children cannot get a good night’s sleep, and adults cannot be rested and ready for work. Many Indigenous Australians aspire to homeownership, as other Australians do. To illustrate that, I note the remarks of Alice Springs traditional owner Darryl Pearce reported in the media last month. Mr Pearce said his people wanted the same rights to landownership and economic development opportunities as other Australians. In his words:

“We want respect and that’s what the government has given us.”

Indigenous Australians taking responsibility

The Australian government wants to help Indigenous people build healthy families and thriving communities. That is why we have invested $1.2 billion in the Northern Territory Emergency Response measures since we were elected, because we are there for the long haul. Since coming to government, the number of people supported by income management has increased from around 1,400 to over 16,000. We have now moved to put the Northern Territory Emergency Response on a long-term, sustainable footing. We have introduced legislation to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act, which the previous government had suspended in order to ensure the Northern Territory Emergency Response was immune from legal challenge. And we have taken the decision to apply income management to all welfare recipients in specified categories across the Northern Territory from July.

The number of people on income management in the Northern Territory is estimated to rise to around 20,000. This is the first step in an extension of the scheme—once it has been carefully evaluated—to disadvantaged locations across Australia. The government’s welfare reforms seek to help all disadvantaged Australians—not just those who are Indigenous—to take on more individual responsibility and to move beyond welfare dependence. In delivering these reforms, we are acting in the interests of the most vulnerable people—the elderly, women and children.

Governments are responsible for helping communities to develop the structures and leaders they need to restore social norms, recognising that change, particularly change of this nature, takes time. However, individuals also have responsibilities—to provide safe and secure homes for their children; to go to school or to make sure their children go to school; to pay rent; to look for work; to avoid self-destructive behaviour and to give the people in their care every opportunity to thrive. These are the foundations on which strong communities are built, and on which people can make the most of their natural abilities.
Today I am asking Indigenous leaders—in families and in communities right across Australia—to step up and take responsibility for restoring strong social norms in their own communities. Many are doing this right now. Just look at the Kimberley town of Fitzroy Crossing, where women such as June Oscar and Emily Carter led a community campaign for alcohol restrictions. Two years after they won their battle, the incidence of domestic violence and alcohol related injuries is down, baby birth weights are up and police say the town is a much calmer place. Now the community is working with police, business and the three tiers of government on a plan to improve services and close the gap in Fitzroy Crossing. Again, this is slow and hard work but I commend the local people for the initiatives that they have taken.

In the nearby town of Halls Creek, the community’s successful push for alcohol restrictions last year has brought a sharp drop in the incidence of arrests and domestic violence. In Queensland, at Mornington Island and Aurukun, as alcohol restrictions have come in, violent crime has gone down. There are many other Indigenous people around Australia who do not make the headlines but are quietly making a difference in their communities—and making fundamental changes in those own communities.

**Australians working together**

All Australians can play a part in building this better future for Indigenous Australians. And Australians from all across our nation are taking action. Across the country, banks, football clubs, mining companies, local councils, hospitals, schools and even the Perth Zoo are hiring Indigenous workers and contracting with Indigenous businesses supporting Indigenous communities. Ten years ago Rio Tinto had 130 Indigenous employees; today they have 1,400. I commend Rio for their work. BHP Billiton has 10 contracts with Indigenous businesses worth $350 million through one of its subsidiaries, WA Iron Ore. It employs 255 Aboriginal workers directly and another 465 indirectly through its contractors. I commend BHP for their work in Indigenous employment.

The ANZ Bank had taken on 420 Indigenous employees by the end of last year, and is committed to filling 10 per cent of entry-level positions with Aboriginal people by 2011. I commend the ANZ Bank for their work. Since 2006, 165 organisations have completed Reconciliation Action Plans through Reconciliation Australia, with 168 more to be launched this year. By the end of this year 15 per cent of the Australian workforce—including employees at Australia’s 11 largest companies—will work for an organisation that has a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Through these practical efforts to promote reconciliation, organisations have created 6,500 positions for Indigenous people, and filled 3,000 of them. This is the private sector at work, and I commend these private sector leaders for making this happen. They have awarded $750 million in contracts to Indigenous businesses. Sometimes they do it because it brings business benefits and because it creates a sustainable investment—for the companies and the Indigenous employees they hire. But these organisations are also taking action because they share a vision of a fairer Australia. All Australians, I believe—and the government believes—want to close the gap.

**Conclusion**

Ninety-one per cent of non-Indigenous Australians and 100 per cent of Indigenous Australians surveyed by Reconciliation Australia said that the relationship between the two peoples was important to this country. Ten years ago this May, a quarter of a million Australians walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge—and 750,000 people walked around
the country—in support of reconciliation. Ten years on, there remains a very long journey ahead of us to lift Indigenous outcomes in health, housing, schools and jobs. But, as a government and as a people, we can now see a path ahead. And we are determined to move forward along that path. Not like the past, where it was non-Indigenous Australians seeking to lead Indigenous Australians, but instead walking together, working together, First Australians alongside all Australians, building a stronger and fairer Australian nation. I present a copy of the 2010 Closing the gap Prime Minister’s report.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (12.31 pm)—I move:
That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition speaking for a period not exceeding 32 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (12.31 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to make a response to the Prime Minister’s statement, although I should indicate to the House that I suspect it may not last for 32 minutes. First of all, let me congratulate the Prime Minister for the historic apology he made in this House two years ago. It was a gracious apology and it was overdue. I also congratulate one of my predecessors, the former member for Bradfield, for his response to the Prime Minister’s apology in which he acknowledged the good as well as the bad that had been done in the past and in which he acknowledged the bad as well as the good which is happening now. That was a necessary antidote to any sense of triumphalism that this generation might have, any sense that we are in some way better than our predecessors in this area. I also thank and acknowledge my predecessor, the member for Wentworth, for his gracious response to the Prime Minister’s statement on this subject 12 months ago. Finally, I thank the Prime Minister for his statement today, which I think is further evidence of the government’s abundant good intentions in this area.

My problem with the Prime Minister’s statement is that good intentions are not enough. What we heard today was much evidence of additional process, much evidence of new programs and expanded programs, but not very much evidence of changed outcomes for Indigenous people. I regret to say that there was little evidence in the Prime Minister’s statement of an appreciation of what is at the heart of the Indigenous problem in this country, the problem of the vast gap that we are all so eager to close. That problem is that in moving as we needed to do from assimilation to self-determination—and I stress that that move was much needed—we replaced employment for so many Aboriginal people, admittedly employment usually in menial work, with life on welfare. That is at the heart of the difficulty that this parliament is grappling with today.

I was disappointed that the Prime Minister did not refer at all to the heroic, pioneering and inspirational work of Noel Pearson in this matter.

Ms Macklin—He did, actually.

Mr ABBOTT—He mentioned some of what is happening in Cape York but without sufficient acknowledgement of the work of Noel Pearson. What Noel Pearson has done is draw attention to the fact that welfare is a poison which is killing his people. What Noel Pearson has done is stress the right of Aboriginal people to take responsibility for their lives, because without that grasping of responsibility there will be no lasting improvement to the situation of Aboriginal people in this country.

There was too much about government in the Prime Minister’s statement and not
enough about the individuals and communities who must also be active if people’s lives are to be changed. There was a bewildering array of programs, a massive litany of spending, but as we listened to the Prime Minister’s statement no-one with familiarity with this area could help but observe that it is very easy to spend money in this area but much, much harder to make a difference. Of course, like everyone in this chamber listening to the Prime Minister’s statement, I welcome the improvements in infant mortality, I welcome what seemed to be improvements in life expectancy, I am pleased about the improved retention rates in schools and I obviously take great satisfaction in the improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. But I also note that the only hard indicators that could be provided to us by the Prime Minister referred mostly to periods of former governments. I suppose it would have been too much to expect any word of acknowledgement in this House for the good work done by other prime ministers and other governments, but I think it is important for me to acknowledge in this House the good work of other prime ministers and other governments in this matter.

Prime Minister John Howard was no less committed to the welfare of Indigenous people than the current Prime Minister. Former Indigenous affairs minister Mal Brough was no less committed to the welfare of Indigenous people than Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin. I pay tribute to them for their good work as I acknowledge the good intentions and the beginnings of some good work by members opposite. But, if there was one note in the Prime Minister’s statement which I found unsettling and which I suspect other members found unsettling, it was a note of self-congratulation—the suggestion that it is only now that real progress is being made, that it is only now that real cooperation is taking place, that it is only now that true understanding has dawned on the Australian people because of the work of the current government. Each generation tends to know a little more than its predecessor, but I think in this matter above all it is incumbent on us to remember that we are but pygmies and if we see far it is because we stand on the shoulders of giants. There were giants in this land long before this generation and their work should be acknowledged. This generation is different from its predecessors, not necessarily better, and our descendants will look at us and they will think that we have made mistakes just as we now look at our forebears and think that they made mistakes.

I now turn to some of the specific programs that were mentioned by the Prime Minister in his statement—first, the Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program in the Northern Territory. I am pleased that the Prime Minister was able to tell us that two houses have now been readied for occupancy, that two families now have the keys to new houses as a result of this program. But I think it would be wrong of me not to remind this House that progress has been very slow and that there has been much process but little performance so far in this program. As members would probably recall, more than $45 million had been spent in this program without a single house being completed. I do acknowledge the work of the minister, who sent extra bureaucrats from Canberra to the Northern Territory to try to improve things—and I trust that things have improved, because she told this House a few months ago that if things did not improve the program would be wholly taken over by the Commonwealth. We will be continuing to monitor this program to try to ensure that the new timetables which appear to have been set really are kept. It is important that Indigenous people are not let down by gov-
ernments which are more talk than they are action, and this is a program which has not started well. If it has, as the Prime Minister suggested today, improved, that is good, but we will certainly be carefully noting further developments in this area.

I also note the comments of the Prime Minister about changes to the welfare quarantining regime in the Northern Territory. One of the greatest achievements of the former government was having the guts to make the emergency intervention in the Northern Territory. It was a very difficult thing to do, because it overturned a generation of thinking and practice in this area. Again, I should note the support which members opposite provided to the emergency intervention when it was announced in the middle of 2007; I thank them. But I must also note that, while the government has maintained the terminology of the intervention and to some extent the programs of the intervention, I fear it has removed it is heart.

I know what the government is trying to do with its changes to the welfare quarantining regime and I respect its desire to ensure that there is not one rule for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and another rule for other Australians in the Northern Territory. I respect that, but I think it would be better off extending the current welfare quarantining regime in the 73 emergency conventions more widely than it would be extending a watered down version of those quarantine rules more widely—because, let there be no doubt about it, that is what is happening. Welfare quarantining in the 73 intervention communities is being watered down. Instead of applying to all government benefits, it will only apply to those people on unemployment benefits who have been on that benefit for 13 weeks in the case of people under 25 and for a year in the case of people over 25. I support the extension of welfare quarantining and I note that it was made possible by the legislative changes of the former government, but I think that it is important that we take steps forward and do not accompany one step forward with what might be an even bigger step backwards in the case of the 17,000 people currently under welfare quarantining in the remote communities of the Northern Territory.

I note the Prime Minister’s statement as to numbers. He said in this parliament today that currently there are over 16,000 subject to quarantine and, as a result of the changes, the number will go up to 20,000. I hope he is right. I think this number is significant and it should be subject to further probing, because it is important that the welfare-quarantining rules begun by the former government are extended by the current government, not watered down.

I also would be keen to know, in the appropriate context, just what consultation the government has had with the women, in particular, of the 73 emergency communities of the Northern Territory, given that it is the women of Hermannsburg and the women of Yuendumu who have been so passionately in favour of the welfare quarantining, which has put food on their families’ tables and which has been so significant in reducing the amount of money that has been gambled or spent on alcohol in these communities.

Like the Prime Minister, I want to see a deeper engagement by all Australians in the lives of Indigenous people; I want to see a deeper engagement by government in improving the lives of Indigenous people. I was disappointed that I did not hear anything in the Prime Minister’s statement today acknowledging one of the fundamental problems of governance in remote Indigenous Australia, and that is the lack of long-term involvement by the same officials, whose decisions are so important, in the communities that are affected by their decisions.
On one of my early trips to Cape York, I was asked by one of my interlocutors whether I was just another ‘seagull’. This is the term that the Indigenous people have for government officials—white guys who fly in, scratch around and then fly out. Not for a second would I deprecate the work that officials are trying to do. Not for a second would I undervalue the goodwill and sincerity that they are bringing to the task. But the truth is it is very difficult to make a difference to communities that you do not have a long-term involvement with. That is one of the big changes that needs to take place if we really are going to make a difference to the remote Indigenous communities of outback Australia. We have to have senior people who are sufficiently committed to the task to spend not weeks, not months but years living amongst the people who are so affected by the decisions that they make.

I was also a little disappointed in the Prime Minister’s statement in that he did not seem to appreciate the importance of Aboriginal people having, in Noel Pearson’s words, ‘skin in the game’. Of course we all want to see better housing for Aboriginal people, particularly in remote areas where housing standards are so poor. But why can’t we have more Aboriginal people involved in building the houses rather than just living in the houses? I know every new contract to build houses is accompanied by official statements about the role of Aboriginal people in their construction and about the importance of training Aboriginal people in the actual carrying out of the program, but all too often these are just words; there is very little, if any, involvement of Aboriginal people in the construction of their homes.

One of the current projects of Noel Pearson and the Cape York Institute is to try to ensure that in at least some communities in Cape York the houses are not just built by QBuild, the Queensland government contracting arm, but they are built by Aboriginal people. I very much hope that, on my annual trip to Cape York later in the year, I will be able to assist in that process and be with some Aboriginal people in the construction of their own homes.

It was good to hear the Prime Minister talking about the progress that has been made in encouraging large Australian businesses to be more interested in employing many Aboriginal people. The Indigenous employment covenant which Andrew ‘Twiggy’ Forrest has inspired is one of the very encouraging contemporary developments when it comes to long-term improvements in the lives of Aboriginal people. I pay tribute to Andrew Forrest and all his collaborators in this task. I also pay tribute to Warren Mundine, the former President of the Australian Labor Party, one of the most significant contemporary Aboriginal leaders, for his work in this area.

But what about self-employment? Why is it that Aboriginal people have to be given jobs? Why can’t we see more opportunity for Aboriginal people to create their own jobs? Maybe there are not hundreds of budding Aboriginal entrepreneurs in Cape York, but there may be a few. Why does the Queensland government’s wild rivers legislation prevent them from using their own land for economic purposes? And why won’t this Prime Minister and this government give time in this parliament to debate and vote upon my private member’s bill to overturn the Queensland wild rivers legislation in respect of Cape York and give Aboriginal people real land rights, give Aboriginal people the right to use their land as an economic asset and not just as a spiritual asset?

It is very easy to stand up in this parliament and to make worthy statements about our intentions and about all the fine government programs that we have put in place, but
here is a very practical way of empowering Aboriginal people which I offer to the Prime Minister: overturn the Wild Rivers Act. Stop the impact of this grubby deal between the Greens in Brisbane and the Queensland government on the real future of the Aboriginal people of Cape York.

If you are not prepared to do this, Prime Minister, aren’t we guilty of just empty symbolism and words without action? Isn’t that precisely the problem that we have had for so many generations in this country—words without action? Let that not be pronounced against this generation as we are so happy to pronounce it against others.

I should not be too harsh on the Prime Minister because I do not for a second doubt his sincerity and I do not for a second doubt his commitment. I suppose what I doubt is his imagination and his real courage to take on vested interests in this area. We all know that it is very important to improve school attendance rates. Yes, it is a disgrace that even on the official figures—which are doctored—attendance at remote schools in the Northern Territory is but 60 per cent. But what more is the Prime Minister proposing to do about this? His speech was silent on this vital matter. We all know that there is massive absenteeism from CDEP, as it used to be, or Work for the Dole, as it is becoming in remote areas. What is the Prime Minister proposing to do about that? His statement on this important issue was similarly silent. We will not close the health gap, and we will not close the housing gap, unless we close the education gap and the employment gap. That is the great challenge of our time. That is the challenge that this parliament faces along with the wider Australian community.

Finally, may I say that it is good that the Prime Minister has made a commitment to speak every year on progress towards closing the gap, even if we have not been able to have these statements on the first day of the parliament as the Prime Minister promised. But it is good that every year there is going to be an Indigenous version of the American State of the Union address. That is a good thing; that is progress. I congratulate the Prime Minister for that, because this is an important task and it is worthy of occupying the attention of this parliament. It is a most worthy task for this parliament. But let us be under no illusion about the magnitude of the job upon which we are embarked and let there be less self-righteousness and more humanity as we move forward to address the great task before us.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery) (12.55 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the document.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Ministerial Statement: Indigenous Affairs
Reference
Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery) (12.56 pm)—I move:

That the document be referred to the Main Committee for debate:
2010 Closing the gap Prime Minister’s report.

NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY AMENDMENT (BACKGROUND CHECKING) BILL 2009
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 19 November 2009, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (12.56 pm)—I rise not to oppose the National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill
Checking the backgrounds of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, it would be clear to see both have a deep passion and deep compassion for the issue of Closing the gap and reconciliation generally. Both may have different views on how to achieve it. I take the opportunity to also say that all of us in this place will be judged on the question of reconciliation in our time here. I would hope all involved in the party process push their leaders to go deeper, to go harder and to go further to close the gap and to reconcile so that both those topics are no longer unnecessary in the policy debate of Australia today.

Just very quickly, there was one issue of concern that I missed in the previous debate on the Prime Minister’s ministerial statement Closing the gap. It is the issue of regionalised and urbanised Indigenous communities. I, for example, am a coastal representative in a regional community on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales. We have about 11 per cent of the Indigenous population of New South Wales. But over the last hour I heard not one single word about regionalised and urbanised or coastal communities and there is an emerging danger as we start to spotlight attention on this issue that a choice emerges between the haves and the have-nots. We start to see politicians wanting to paint the picture that all Aboriginal issues are from dusty outback towns and that the only voice is that of Noel Pearson and Cape York Institute. We do not want to go down the path of developing a have-and-have-not culture as we move towards trying to grapple with closing the gap. The Noel Pearsons of the world do some wonderful work for the Cape York communities, but there are many voices in the Indigenous communities of Australia which have many wants and needs.

Likewise, while there are many challenging and complex issues in the dusty outback towns of the Northern Territory, there are just as complex and just as challenging issues on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales. I would have loved to have heard about some of the work the government might or might not be doing but should be doing in communities such as Middleton Street in South Kempsey or Purfleet in Taree. These also should be part of the picture of improving the lot of all Australians. Hopefully, next year we will hear some more talk about some of the regional and urbanised communities and the work that is being done in those as well.

In rising to speak on this bill I do not oppose it. The National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009 seeks to amend the National Health Security Act 2007 to enable the minister to require that the Australian background-checking service of the Attorney-General’s Department, AusCheck, conduct background checking of people who handle or dispose of security sensitive biological agents. I would have thought that it was a no-brainer. It is a sensible change and I would hope it is one that is embraced broadly by all of us in this place. I do not think that background checking can be called an invasion of privacy. It is a sensible and appropriate way of making sure people of credibility and trust hold positions where credibility and trust are needed in their daily work.

The broader point that I continue to make about some of these issues as they have come through this place in my short time here is that, despite not opposing this bill, despite not having a problem with background checking, I do continue to fly the flag for liberty and the concept of individual liberties in this country. We live in a generation where in the Australian community—and I do not know whether it is knowingly or unknowingly—that concept of individual liberty is not being placed on the pedestal it should be, and as a consequence we have
seen that challenged over the last decade and so much given up as far as individual rights within the daily life of an ordinary Australian.

For democracy to be strong, for freedom to be present, liberty needs to be protected. I would have hoped that that would be something that everyone would generally endorse. Therefore, we need to be vigilant in our roles as public policy makers in protecting that concept of liberty and making sure that encroachment by governments and executive—in particular over the last decade into territory that starts to challenge some of those individual liberties and therefore challenge the freedoms of this country—is not overstepped. In this case, I do not think it is, but I continue to raise the point that I am here flying the flag for those individual liberties and making sure that the executive is the servant of the people rather than trying to be its master. I do not oppose this bill. I think it is a sensible change, and I look forward to seeing it in practice and delivering some good outcomes through the AusCheck system.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (1.02 pm)—I would like to start my contribution to this debate by agreeing with the member for Lyne in that when we do implement legislation we must always be careful that we do not lose more than we gain. I feel that the National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009 is vital legislation as it is about ensuring the security of our nation by protecting it from biological weapons. The protection is given by establishing controls for the security of biological agents that could be used as weapons. These are known as security sensitive biological agents, which I will refer to from here on as SSBAs. One of the controls is that the minister may determine by legislative instrument standards for the security status of the person who handles or disposes of the SSBA. In simple terms this means that there will be background checks on the person who is responsible for the SSBA to check whether they have a criminal record. A personal check will also be done on that person.

This legislation has become necessary as a result of a Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry in 2009 which found it to be necessary for the NHS Act to be amended to establish this background-checking scheme. The background-checking scheme will be conducted by AusCheck. This has become apparent since the passing of the act in September 2007, and there has been extensive consultation with the stakeholders on the need for background checks of persons who handle or dispose of these materials. Community consultation has been imperative, because it goes to ensuring that all of the stakeholders and interested groups are able to have input into the legislation, are able to ensure that there is proper probity and are able to ensure that we do not lose more than we gain. There were workshops on the draft SSBA standards. A wide range of stakeholders were consulted on the need for background checks, including the Implementation Advisory and Consultative Committee, the Regulation and Standards Working Group and state and territory governments through the National Counter-Terrorism Committee secretariat. The Australian Government Solicitor has advised that the proposed changes will establish the SSBA background checks, which will permit operational details to be set out in the SSBA standards and in the AusCheck regulations.

This legislation will ensure that the minister is able to require personnel who handle or dispose of SSBAs to undergo background checks. This is very important with the very sensitive material that people are involved with handling or disposing. This legislation
will require background checks to be conducted specifically under the AusCheck scheme with the right checks and balances in place.

The government has worked on this over the past 18 months with organisations that handle SSBAs and other experts in the field to ensure the smooth implementation of the checks and all aspects of the standards dealing with the security status of the person that is handling or disposing of the SSBAs. The proposed SSBA background-checking scheme has been the subject of extensive consultation. That makes me feel easier about it. I am very happy to support this legislation. I think it is vital legislation and it is legislation that goes to ensuring the security of our nation.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (1.08 pm)—I am very pleased to sum up today’s debate on the National Health Security Amendment (Background Checking) Bill 2009. I thank the members for their contributions to the debate on this bill. The bill amends the National Health Security Act 2007 to enhance Australia’s obligations for securing certain biological agents that could be used as weapons, known as security sensitive biological agents or SSBAs. As members have discussed, the bill enables the relevant minister to set standards to require background checking of persons who handle or dispose of SSBAs. The bill strengthens Australia’s security against potential threats and delivers on the Rudd government’s commitment to protect all Australians. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (1.09 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (TORTURE PROHIBITION AND DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 19 November 2009, on motion by Mr McClelland:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (1.10 pm)—I rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Bill 2009. I am sure all members would join me in saying that torture is one of the most profound human rights abuses and it takes a terrible toll, sadly, on millions of people—on the individuals themselves and, of course, on their families. Rape, blows to the soles of the feet, suffocation in water, burns, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, shaking and beating are commonly used by torturers to break down an individual’s personality.

As terrible as the physical wounds are, the psychological and emotional scars are equally as devastating and very difficult to repair. Australia has had an influx of people who have come here under our very generous humanitarian program who sadly do bear the scars of this terrible abuse of their human rights. Many of them end up in my electorate of Stirling where they require extensive support and help to get over the psychological and emotional wounds that have been inflicted by having to suffer these terrible experiences. Many torture survivors suffer recurring nightmares and flashbacks. They withdraw from family, school and work and they feel a loss of trust. That loss of trust extends to the authorities and that can also create problems.
The United Nations defines torture as:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to lawful sanctions.

That is a rather convoluted definition that essentially says something that of course would never happen in modern-day Australia and that is that torture would be inflicted by a public official against one of our citizens.

The death penalty, which this bill seeks to abolish from some of the statute books of the states, has a long and colourful history in Australia. The first recorded execution in Australia took place at Port Jackson on 27 February 1788. Thomas Barrett was hanged for stealing food from public stores, which shows you that, by the standards of the time, that was a pretty severe offence. Governor Phillip commuted the death sentences of the two co-accused at the time. Prior to 1793 only one woman was executed and her name has not been recorded in history. For the following 180 years after that the death penalty was practised in Australia, but nobody has been executed in Australia since 2 February 1967 when Ronald Ryan was hung in Melbourne for shooting a prison guard during an escape attempt.

Since 1973 and the passage of the Death Penalty Abolition Act, the death penalty has not applied in respect of offences under the law of the Commonwealth and territories. The states have enacted their own legislation that has outlawed this practice, at very different times. Queensland was the first state to abolish the death penalty for all crimes, in 1922, and New South Wales was the last state to abolish it, in 1985. New South Wales had actually abolished the death penalty for murder in 1955, but it retained the death penalty for treason and piracy until 1985.

On 2 October 1990, Australia confirmed at an international level its opposition to the death penalty by ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. The protocol entered into force in international law on 1 July 1991. Clearly this is an indication that the trend amongst all states around the world is to abolish the death penalty, and we now have reached a point where there are more abolitionist states than states that retain the death penalty—that is, in terms of the number of countries. However, sadly, 60 per cent of the world’s population still live in countries where executions take place. So the majority of the world’s population still live in countries that retain the death penalty as a form of punishment. They include countries such as the People’s Republic of China, India, the United States and Indonesia. It is probably fair to say that none of those states looks as if it will abolish the death penalty at any time soon.

Of course, once we have abolished the death penalty at home and signed on to international conventions to reinforce that, that is not the beginning and end of the death penalty debate in Australia, as we have seen over the last few years, when we have been faced, sadly, with the execution of some of our citizens in other countries abroad. Increasingly, as a community, we need to grapple with the question: what does it mean when we have abolished the death penalty here when we live in the midst of a region where most of our neighbours and allies continue to use capital punishment? It is diffic-
cult, and it is a challenge for our foreign policy to strike a balance and to maintain good relations with our neighbours and allies and respect their sovereignty and their right to administer justice within their own jurisdictions as they see fit whilst at the same time always striving to make sure that Australians are protected abroad from this very severe sanction. The coalition opposition are opposed to the death penalty, and this is on the basis that it is a breach of one of our most fundamental rights—that is, the human right to life.

The provisions of this bill are founded on the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Schedule 1 of the bill replaces the existing offence of torture in the Crimes (Torture) Act of 1988 with a new offence in the Criminal Code. The definition of ‘torture’ is a public official, or someone acting at a public official’s behest, engaging in conduct that inflicts severe physical or mental pain or suffering on the victim for the purpose of punishing, intimidating or coercing the victim or a third person. The definition is derived from the UN convention and is in essentially the same terms as it was in in the 1988 act.

In recent years the UN Committee Against Torture has called on nations to enact a specific torture offence. In its concluding observations on Australia, issued in May 2008, the United Nations Committee Against Torture recommended that Australia enact a specific offence of torture at the federal level. Along with this, the UN convention requires that all acts of torture be offences under domestic criminal law, including the application of states’ jurisdiction to acts occurring anywhere in the world. The change effected by this bill is to create the extraterritorial offence, applicable beyond acts committed in Australia or by persons subsequently present in Australia. The offence is intended to operate concurrently with state and territory offences.

Schedule 2 of the bill extends the application of the current prohibition on the death penalty to state laws in addition to Commonwealth, territory and imperial laws, to which the Death Penalty Abolition Act 1973 already applies. Accordingly, this will ensure that the death penalty will not be able to be reintroduced anywhere in Australia—clearly something that I think has been ruled out by public opinion a long time ago. It will therefore safeguard Australia’s ongoing compliance with the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, to which, as I previously said, Australia became a party in October 1990. The coalition supports the comprehensive rejection of capital punishment, which will also demonstrate Australia’s commitment to the worldwide abolitionist movement and complement Australia’s international lobbying efforts against the death penalty.

In conclusion, the explanatory memorandum notes that, although the new offence of torture applies to public officials both within and outside Australia, it is not anticipated that it will affect legitimate law enforcement and intelligence-gathering activities routinely carried out by federal, state and territory government agencies in the course of their duties.

As the former Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies said when introducing the National Security Bill in 1939, a year when national security was very much on the minds of all Australians:

… the greatest tragedy that could overcome a country would be for it to fight a successful war
in defence of liberty and to lose its own liberty in the process.

I think those words, spoken decades ago, still apply to us, very rightly, in Australia. Australia is a nation with strong democratic and human rights traditions. We must be vigilant to protect these tenets of our democracy. The coalition supports the passage of this bill and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr Hayes (Werriwa) (1.20 pm)—There can be no more important public discourse on human rights than that on the death penalty and the lives of our citizens, and it is for this reason that I rise today to lend my full support to the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Bill 2009. I would like to start by thanking the Attorney-General for his resolve to introduce this significant human rights bill into the House and ensure that Australia fully complies with its international obligations to combat torture and to demonstrate our commitment to being part of the worldwide abolitionist movement. Whilst this bill contains two key human rights measures, I would like to concentrate my comments on the second measure, which extends the application of the current prohibition of the death penalty to state criminal law.

This is an issue that I, along with other members of the House, have been involved with for some time. I am certainly concerned that as a parliament we should do all that we can to save the lives of three young Australian citizens—members of a group colloquially known as the ‘Bali Nine’—now on death row in Indonesia. As members would be aware, I have put on record in this House on a number of occasions why I decided to take a stand on this matter. I speak not just in pursuit of a matter which I genuinely regard as being a most significant human rights issue but as a parent who holds the view that, regardless of what our children do, there is nothing that extinguishes our love and our care for our kids.

In particular, I have shared with the House the plight of Scott Rush, who is one of the three young Australians on death row in Kerobokan prison. It is well to record that Scott was a courier, a 17-year-old drug mule, when he was arrested at Denpasar airport a little over four years ago. He has now been in prison all that time, but over the last two years has been on death row. I have spoken about the judgment which imposed the death sentence on Scott Rush, which surprisingly contains almost no comparative analysis with any other accused person.

I would like to make it very clear at this point that I condemn the menacing criminal world of drug related crime. And I know, after meeting Scott’s parents, Lee and Christine, that they share that view. Nevertheless, it must be said that, if Scott had been convicted in Australia for his crime of being a drug courier, he would likely have received a custodial sentence in the order of 10 years. I know that at the heart of our judicial system is the principle that the punishment should fit the crime—and, as I understand, that is also a central rule in the Indonesian criminal justice system. I have received a number of letters from Scott Rush over the past 18 months or so, and I have previously shared those with the House, but they all go to show Scott’s effort to show good behaviour, his rehabilitation—but, moreover, his genuine wish to deter other young people from getting involved with drugs. In November this year my wife, Bernadette, and I received a Christmas card from Scott. Each time I receive correspondence from him, it certainly does have a profound effect, at least on me, because it takes me back to thinking, ‘What if he were one of my sons?’

As I stated earlier, Scott now spends his days and nights in Bali not knowing from
one day to the next as to what will be his final hour. In my previous remarks to this House I have highlighted the fact that Scott’s parents, Lee and Christine, are like the rest of us—typical parents, with all the struggles of ordinary life. But we share the common bond in our unreserved love for our children. Each time that I meet with Lee and Christine Rush I see the emotional strain that they are under, having a son condemned to death in a foreign land. Receiving his Christmas card, I can only imagine what thoughts go through their minds at that particularly holy season that we celebrate.

What makes matters worse in this case is that it was out of love that Lee and Christine Rush notified the Federal Police of what they suspected their son was up to in relation to courriering drugs. That ultimately led to an investigation which led to his arrest in Denpasar. On what was an attempt by his parents to prevent a life of crime, particularly a life involving drugs, Lee Rush said to me, ‘I did not realise I would be condemning my son to death.’

It is for these reasons that I have said before in this parliament that we need to be very clear in our message, and certainly our message to the Rush family, that both sides of this parliament support the abolition of capital punishment in all places. The measure in this bill relating to Australia’s opposition to the death penalty demonstrates that this government does care about the predicament of not only the Rush family but of all Australians, regardless of where they are, and that we oppose the death penalty as a genuine human rights issue.

Australia has a longstanding principle of opposing capital punishment. The death penalty was abolished in Australia federally in 1973 in this parliament, by one of my predecessors in the seat of Werriwa, Gough Whitlam. He led his government in one of the more significant human rights measures they took in abolishing the death penalty.

In 1990 Australia signed the second operational protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which importantly commits Australia to the abolition of the death penalty. Australia voted in the UN General Assembly resolutions calling for a global moratorium on the death penalty in 2007. Australia annually cosponsors a resolution of the UN Human Rights Commission that calls for all nations to abolish the death penalty.

The right to life is a fundamental human right recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights of 1966. It is our duty to ensure that these rights do have a living reality. Just over a year after the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the declaration, it is an occasion now for all of us to recommit to our position in a practical manner in terms of giving effect to those declarations. They remain as relevant today as the day they were adopted. Last year I moved a motion in this place and called on the House to incorporate into domestic law the contents of the second operational protocol on the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights to ensure the unequivocal abolition of the death penalty throughout Australia and to commit Australia’s position so it would be seen worldwide for what it is—that is, that we be seen as an abolitionist country. I seek leave to continue my remarks at a later time.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Home Insulation Program

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts) (1.30 pm)—by leave—Insulation is one of the cheapest and most effective forms of household energy efficiency. Ceiling insu-
lation can reduce heating and cooling costs by up to 40 per cent and these important factors were top of mind for the government in the development of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, amongst the other significant stimulus measures this government put in place.

The program was announced on 3 February 2009, with an early installation phase ahead of the full program rollout on 1 July 2009. The initial program guidelines released on 26 February required that products installed under the program meet the requirements of the Building Code of Australia and relevant insulation standards. These guidelines also required that products be installed in line with the relevant safety requirements under the Australian standards.

Throughout this early phase, my department undertook significant consultations with stakeholders from industry, regulatory bodies, state and territory agencies and technical experts. The purpose of these consultations was to finalise the program design ahead of the full rollout, addressing key issues including audit and compliance, safety requirements and training requirements. Through this process my department convened roundtables and workshops with relevant stakeholders to determine all the potential risks related to insulation installation and to ensure they were fully assessed and addressed in the final program design.

I have requested from my department details of safety issues raised in these discussions in order to provide clarity around safety risks identified by stakeholders and how they have been addressed and incorporated into the program guidelines. I can provide the House with the following details around the key risks identified.

My department has informed me that on 18 February 2009 officials at an industry consultation meeting heard a proposal for mandatory training for all installers, with a concern that specialist skills would be required for some tradespeople, who would not necessarily have insulation experience. As a direct response to this work began on the development of the first ever nationally accredited training program for insulation installers, which commenced in line with the full program rollout on 1 July 2009.

My department has informed me that on 3 April 2009 a technical workshop between DEWHA officials, testing bodies, experts and other government agencies was told that insulation work in existing buildings could result in a high level of hazard from hazardous materials and occupational health and safety issues, with a likelihood of death or injury if risks were not managed. As a direct response, my department moved to develop a comprehensive risk assessment, facilitated by Minter Ellison Consulting, to identify and manage the full range of risks in successful implementation of the project ahead of the full rollout on 1 July.

My department has informed me that on 29 April a meeting with state and territory government fair trading authorities was told that the scale of the program would change the dynamics of the insulation market and increase the risk of substandard installations from unskilled workers. In response, my department has since entered into memorandums of understanding with state and territory fair trading authorities to ensure effective responses to household issues and the sharing of information.

As a consequence of these consultations the government put in place the first nationally accredited training program for insulation installers, and on 29 June 2009 launched the national Installer Provider Register, setting out the terms and conditions for every installer to operate under the Home Insulation Program and ensuring the public would...
have access to a list of registered installers before agreeing to have any work undertaken in their homes.

As I stated in the House yesterday, the National Electrical and Communications Association, NECA, wrote to me on 9 March to request that insulation installers under the Energy Efficient Homes package meet minimum eligibility requirements, such as courses run by registered training organisations. My department responded on 16 April 2009, stating that the guidelines referred to the wiring and minimum clearing distances as stated in AS/NZS 3000:2007, and that a training program was in development based upon existing units. That correspondence also advised NECA that they would be added to the stakeholder register as an organisation that may be able to provide as needs advice, consultation and information dissemination.

Following on from these and other consultations, including with relevant departments across government, my department finalised the assessment of the risks associated with the installation of insulation, informing requirements for safety, training, audit and compliance ahead of the full rollout on 1 July to provide for the efficient delivery of the Home Insulation Program on that date. This risk assessment was facilitated by Minter Ellison Consulting, and informed the final design of the program.

On 9 June 2009 the Installer Provider Register was opened for registration from installers around Australia, the first time a national industry register has been put in place. The full rollout of the Home Insulation Program was launched on 1 July. On 1 September 2009 the Low Emissions Assistance Plan for Renters was discontinued, with landlords eligible for the full subsidy under the main part of the program. From this time a pricing table was added to the program guidelines to promote competitive pricing and it was required that all quotes for installations were based on physical site inspections.

On 14 October 2009 there was the tragic death of an insulation installer in Queensland linked to the Home Insulation Program. A coronial investigation by Queensland authorities commenced and further action would be taken pending its outcomes. Advice was sought immediately from my department in relation to this incident and the safety concerns which it gave rise to. The next advice informed me the department was awaiting information from investigations of Queensland agencies. I was also advised that the department’s audit and compliance program included ensuring the insulation installed under the program met Australian standards, including the relevant safety requirements. I met with Malcolm Richards from Master Electricians on 20 October, and subsequent to that meeting I requested urgent advice from the department on a range of matters concerning potential changes to the Home Insulation Program to address the issue of foil insulation safety.

On 22 October I received additional advice. Foil products meet Australian standards and are a valid alternative for installing ceiling insulation in existing homes—for example, in hot and humid climates, for pitched roofs with flat ceilings and cathedral ceilings. Major foil manufacturers have products suitable for retrofitting and provide detailed instructions on how foil products should be installed. Warnings about electrical safety are a feature of manufacturers’ instructions. This advice detailed significant electrical safety components in training units and materials, indicated that EE-Oz reviewed the relevant pocketbook and stated that the information there covered electrical safety.

This advice also said that the Queensland Electrical Safety Office at this stage had
made no recommendation that foil products be banned from use in Queensland. The advice also reinforced that employers must provide and maintain a safe and healthy work environment by providing and maintaining safe plant; ensuring the safe use, handling, storage and transport of substances; ensuring safe systems of work; and providing information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure health and safety. My department’s advice was that I should not ban foil products under the program unless the Queensland Electrical Safety Office or other relevant regulators changed their current policy positions or recommendations from the Queensland coronial inquiry came forward to that effect.

At a subsequent meeting to consider potential changes to the program which I attended along with MBA, HIA, EE-Oz, CPSISC, Master Electricians, AFIA, ICANZ, Standards Australia, Queensland ESO, ABCB and DEWHA, I stated that the highest standards of safety for householders and installers were of paramount focus for the Australian government and steps had been taken in rolling out this program to ensure safety issues were appropriately addressed. My department would continue to work closely with industry and relevant state regulatory agencies to further strengthen the safety aspects of the program. As a matter of urgency, I would be looking at the recommendations put forward and would not hesitate to further boost training requirements, safety standards and compliance measures under this program if required.

I understand that, as well, general views were put by: Master Builders Association, who noted that relevant agencies are responsible for building, work safe and occupational health and safety regulations in the various jurisdictions; the Housing Industry Association, who generally noted that foil is used for all sorts of reasons and that a ban would be premature; EE-Oz, who, even though existing national units of competency cover electrical safety, wanted to work with CPSISC to conduct a gap analysis of the training package and to advise the department of additional measures to include electrical safety; Master Electricians, who were very concerned in general terms that metal fasteners and foil insulation pose an unacceptable electrocution risk and that electrical problems could emerge at the time of installation or even up to several months after the work was done, but who, in general terms, were not seeking a ban on foil outright but rather a suspension of the assistance for retrofitting foil under the program until normal market forces returned; and AFIA, who noted that foil has been deployed successfully for over 25 years in a retrofit situation with very few safety problems.

On 28 October I subsequently approved guideline changes and additional electrical safety checks. Following the receipt of additional advice, I instructed my department to work with Queensland Electrical Safety Office and Master Electricians to roll out a targeted electrical safety testing program of homes with foil insulation installed in Queensland, starting at 10 per cent and with the sample sizes to be adjusted based on results. I instructed my department to further strengthen cooperation with state and territory occupational health and safety and work safe agencies to ensure installers were operating in a safe work environment, focusing particularly on supervisory conditions. I noted that relevant industry skills councils were already reviewing the training materials for gaps on safety issues.

From 1 November I announced the ban on the use of metal fasteners for insulation under the program. I mandated the use of covers over downlights and other relevant ceiling appliances and I mandated pre-inspection risk assessments by installers in each home.
On 9 November Malcolm Richards from Master Electricians responded to these measures, writing to me as follows:

Master Electricians Australia commends you on your recent changes to the Home Ceiling insulation programs. The banning of metal fasteners, mandatory down light covers and the requirement for installers to undertake further training on the electrical risks of installing insulation was immediate, proportionate and is very likely to have saved lives …

On 18 November I was informed of a second fatality relating to the installation of insulation under the program in Queensland. On 24 November I was informed, tragically, of a third fatality, this time in New South Wales. In the ensuing period I instructed my department to proceed with the changes to the program that would mandate that every person installing insulation under the program must have completed the insulation installation training developed by the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council.

On 17 December I announced that all installers going into ceilings would be required to have a trade specific competency or prior insulation industry experience or to complete a registered or accredited training course — and to show evidence of this prior to 12 February, allowing a period for installers to ensure their employees took the necessary training in order to comply with these requirements. On 4 February I was informed, tragically, of a further fatality under the program in Queensland. On 9 February I announced the suspension of the use of foil insulation under the program, based on interim results of the Queensland electrical safety roof inspections, which I had initiated in late 2009, and advice from my department. On 10 February 2010 I announced that, subject to further interim advice from these inspections, all foil insulation installed under the government’s Home Insulation Program would undergo an electrical safety inspection.

Safety is a top priority for the Rudd government under this program, as it is in relation to all programs that this government brings forward. Providing timely and comprehensive responses to the issues that are raised by the industry have been a feature of the delivery of this program. Consultation with relevant regulatory authorities has taken place on a regular basis, as it has with industry bodies as well. That has been the consistent approach that I have taken to the delivery of the government’s Home Insulation Program.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (TORTURE PROHIBITION AND DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (1.45 pm)— Further to my earlier remarks on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Bill 2009, a notice of motion I submitted last year sought to incorporate into domestic law the provisions of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to communicate to the world that this country is ardently opposed to the death penalty. Even though there are no proposals by any state or territory government to reintroduce the death penalty, with the passage of this bill Australia will have implemented, in practical and effective legal terms, the second optional protocol by ensuring that the death penalty cannot be reintroduced in any jurisdiction in this country.

The passage of the bill provides a firm basis for diplomatic and political representations to be made with respect to citizens overseas who are condemned to death. It does so because there is nothing more Aus-
Australia can do legally under international law to say to the world that this country stands firm against the death penalty and capital punishment. We have shown our abhorrence to the death penalty through our fundamental societal values. The passage of this bill will permanently protect the lives of all persons whether they be citizens of this country or not who are convicted of serious crimes in Australia. That is not to say that fitting punishment will not be imposed—of course it will. It will be applied through incarceration, and the punishment will fit the crime in accordance with our criminal law.

This bill is in line with consistent trends we see worldwide to abolish the death penalty. I encourage all members of this place to do what they can to advocate the abolition of the death penalty. I urge all members to speak out clearly and consistently against the use of capital punishment. Unless we do that and are consistent in our position on the death penalty, we will be accused of hypocrisy every time it comes to defending Australian citizens facing death penalty charges in another country.

We must continue to push our abhorrence of the death penalty as a fundamental value of Australian society and consistently oppose the imposition of the death penalty in any context and for any offence as a matter of principle. That must be a firm, bipartisan policy. This bill does that. The passage of this bill records, as much as the government can, the importance of the life of our citizens, particularly in relation to those I mentioned earlier such as Scott Rush.

In conclusion, I am proud to be a member of a government that has taken steps to demonstrate its fundamental opposition to acts that are contrary to basic human values and its abhorrence of capital punishment. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (1.50 pm)—It is a great privilege to speak in support of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Bill 2009. Firstly, I want to support the comments of the member for Werriwa in defence of Australian citizens who are found in positions overseas where the death penalty is still law. It is something that perplexes Australians of all persuasions that many of our young citizens can be committed to death in other countries. This country’s campaign for the continued abolition of the death penalty is a worthy one and something we should pursue in this place.

This bill amends the Criminal Code Act 1995 and the Death Penalty Abolition Act 1973, and will enact in the Commonwealth Criminal Code a specific Commonwealth torture offence, which will operate concurrently with the existing offences in state and territory criminal laws. The bill also abolishes the death penalty throughout Australia by amending the Death Penalty Abolition Act to apply to state criminal laws. I support both of these intentions as worthy intentions of this parliament.

I think there are many conditions under which the state may seek to take the life of one of its citizens. However, I think that all of those are fraught with danger and imperfect in their application and in their definition. While we are not able to devise a system where we can be certain about the circumstances or nature of a person’s wrongdoings, we ought not to pursue the ultimate penalty that the state can inflict. I do accept that the right to life is a basic human right, something that Australia is committed to through its United Nations obligations, and it is something that we have to work through our legislative program to ensure that we are committing to those United Nations commitments.
Since 1989 Australia has been party to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Amongst some other obligations, this convention requires us to ensure that all acts of torture or offences under domestic criminal law are banned. Torture is something we can all agree on. It is defined in this convention as any act by which severe pain or suffering is intentionally inflicted upon a person by a public official for certain specified purposes such as obtaining information or confession from the person. Once again, when you consider the role of the state and what kind of state we want to have active in our country, it is hard to imagine a circumstance where the intentional infliction of torture upon any person is something that we would accept or indeed condone.

The Crimes (Torture) Act 1988 currently criminalises acts of torture committed outside Australia, only when committed, of course, by Australian citizens or other persons who are subsequently present in Australia. Acts of torture that are committed anywhere in the world during the course of an armed conflict or as a crime against humanity are currently criminalised under the Criminal Code Act 1995. So torture prohibition I think is perhaps the easier issue contained within this bill, something that I am sure many within this place would agree with easily.

Abolition of the death penalty in all of the states is something that I think would be considered to be more controversial. There are circumstances where I am reluctant to use the Commonwealth’s power to override states’ rights in relation to many issues. However, I think in this case, considering our United Nations obligations, that this is a worthy objective and something we ought to pursue. We have a longstanding policy as a nation of opposition to the death penalty. We are party to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the second optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

Listening to the member for Werriwa in relation to some of our citizens who are currently interned in prisons overseas—such as in Bali, Indonesia—for significant crimes who are facing the death penalty, I think it is a worthy signal that we should send to our neighbours that we as a nation do not accept the right of the state to take the life of a citizen.

It is also interesting to note that we have faced this challenge over all of Australia’s history. In the Sydney Morning Herald this week a petition has been put forward for the pardon of Harry ‘Breaker’ Morant and Peter Hancock, Australian soldiers executed by the British for the murder of prisoners in the dying days of the Boer War. Indeed, this case is instructive in relation to this bill because under military law the British executed two of our citizens without reference to Australia. All Australians took a strong view, not necessarily on the circumstances but on the way this was handled by a foreign power with regard to two of our citizens. The death penalty was applied by the British government at the time without reference to the Australian government. This forever changed the landscape in relation to how we allow foreign powers to deal with our citizens, and of course since then there has been no incidence of that occurring. We would never allow a foreign power today to discipline any of our citizens in that way in a military context.

However, that is only one of the concerns that come up in relation to the abolition of the death penalty. You need to consider the youth and the innocence of many of the people who commit crimes in relation to drugs, and we have seen many incidents in recent
years of people doing things that are wrong in relation to the peddling of drugs in foreign countries. Some of these people are 17, 18, 19 or 20 years old, and for those people to be sentenced to death in another country for these kinds of crimes is something that is, in my view and the view of many here, absolutely disproportionate to the crime. In enacting law we ought to consider very carefully that the punishment should fit the crime and be a fitting and understandable infliction on a person who does commit a crime. I think what has happened in many of these cases is that the punishment does not fit the crime. How can we send a signal to these countries? I think this bill is a worthy way of doing that and sending a strong signal that the abolition of the death penalty is something that our nation supports. The prohibition of torture and the abolition of the death penalty are certainly worthy objectives, and I commend this bill to the House.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (1.57 pm)—In November last year I was in my parliamentary office to prepare my speech in support of this important legislation, the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Bill 2009, which imports into Australian domestic law the principles contained in the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment—an instrument that Australia has been a party to since 1989—and the provisions of the second optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. While I was in the office that day the mail was delivered. Among the envelopes addressed to me was a handwritten one with stamps indicating it had been sent from Indonesia. I opened the envelope to find inside a Christmas card. The card was from Scott Rush, one of the young Australians on death row in Indonesia. He wrote:

Kerobokan Prison
18 November 2009
Dear Ms Parke
Peace be with you this Christmas. I thank you for all you have done for me again this year. God bless.
Scott Rush

Despite all this young man is going through, he had the presence of mind and the kindness to write this lovely card. This bill is for Scott and those imprisoned with him on death row, whatever their nationality and whatever their crime. This bill is for all those who have gone before them for whom it is too late.

As noted by renowned anti-death penalty campaigner and author of Dead Man Walking and The Death of Innocents, Sister Helen Prejean:

The practice of the death penalty is the practice of torture. By the time people I have been with finally climb into the chair to be killed, they have died a thousand times already because of their anticipation of the final horror.

By this bill we as a nation fundamentally repudiate the death penalty and the use of torture. We repudiate these acts in keeping with our international obligations. We repudiate them explicitly in the form of Commonwealth law as one of the highest statements of our common values and convictions. It is an affront to human dignity whenever a fellow human being is tortured or put to death. By this law we clearly say that the state shall not put individuals to death and that the state shall not in any circumstances practise torture.

I commend the Attorney-General for his work in preparing this bill. Australia has taken significant steps under this Labor government to re-engage with the international community. As the Attorney-General has noted, the United Nations Committee against Torture recommended that Australia enact a specific offence of torture at the federal
level. Torture is any act by which severe pain or suffering is intentionally inflicted upon a person by a public official for certain purposes such as obtaining information—

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. Can the minister confirm that, following the tragic death of an installer in October 2009, the CEO of Master Electricians Australia wrote to him on 16 October—four months ago—and urged him to take immediate action to withdraw the rebate for foil batts, warning him that ‘the potential for further fatalities cannot be dismissed’? Can the minister also confirm that in his meeting on 20 October with the CEO, Mr Richards, the minister was personally advised of the serious dangers of the products being used in the home insulation scheme and was also informed of six other incidents of electric shock? Minister, why did it take until this week, and three more deaths, for the minister to act?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question. I can confirm receipt of that letter, and I can confirm the actions that attended to it and that I have just detailed at some length in a statement to the House—and the honourable member was there and he heard that statement. I can further say to the honourable member that, on 3 November, Master Electricians Australia wrote to me specifically commending me on my changes to the home ceiling insulation program. They said:

The banning of metal fasteners, mandatory down light covers and the requirement for installers to undertake further training on the electrical risks of installing insulation was immediate, proportionate and is very likely to have saved lives … We acted on the basis of the advice that was in front of us in a way which was consistent with our commitment to safety, and we will continue to do so.

Climate Change

Ms RISHWORTH (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. What is the best way to tackle climate change and secure Australia as a low-pollution economy for the future?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Kingston for her question. It is important that we respond to the climate change challenge in a way that sets up our economy for the future and protects our environment for the future. It is important that we note this particularly today when we had the member for Wentworth vote with the government, consistent with his stated principles about the best way of dealing with the challenge of climate change. This stands in stark contrast with those opposite, who articulated those same principles only two months ago but departed from them in today’s votes in the House.

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is an emissions trading scheme which seeks to do the following: put a cap on carbon pollution, do so by charging Australia’s biggest polluters, and use that money to provide compensation for working families so that they in turn can use that money to assist in making their homes more energy efficient. It is a totally costed, totally funded scheme. It makes the big polluters pay for their pollution, it uses the money raised to deal with the increase in the cost of living for consumers, and it is upfront about that. Every cent we raise from polluters will be put back into
helping families and businesses adjust. On top of that, 92 per cent of households would be provided with assistance. Only the wealthiest households would miss out.

That is our approach. That is the government’s clearly articulated position. The other system—if you can call it a system—is the climate change con offered by those opposite. The climate change con put forward by the Leader of the Opposition does less, costs more and is totally unfunded. Firstly, it does less in the sense that it will result in a 13 per cent increase in greenhouse gas emissions. That is the calculation undertaken by the relevant authorities. Secondly, it costs more. It will cost the taxpayer three times more. Further, given that it is totally unfunded, that extra cost to the taxpayer will be met either by increasing taxes or by reducing government services, and those opposite have refused to rule out either.

That is before you take into account the other design feature—if you can call it that—of their proposal, the climate change con, which is a hidden penalties regime whereby firms are fined, with penalties, if they go beyond what is called ‘business as usual’. There is no definition about how many companies would be caught up in the secret penalties regime and no compensation for the flow-through impact which that would have on prices for consumers. We provide compensation; they provide not a single dollar of compensation.

This is all completely understandable because, as the member for Wentworth said on a previous occasion, the proposal being put forward by those opposite is simply a fig leaf to disguise the fact that nothing substantial is being done. That is what it is about; it is a fig leaf and we understand why: because, in the immortal words of the Leader of the Opposition, climate change is ‘absolute crap’.

Therefore, that is what we have before us: the climate change con of those opposite.

Since the opposition has released its approach, its climate change con, we have had further developments in terms of what others think about the scheme. The original supporters of the scheme—or those drawn upon by the Leader of the Opposition to provide detailed advice on how to construct the scheme—Frontier Economics, have walked away from the scheme at a million miles an hour. They said: ‘We’ve never said anything about whether that scheme is more cost effective than the CPRS. It has been a very limited review in this case.’ The very interesting observation is this: they say: ‘I don’t think it is sustainable in the long term. It is more of a short- to medium-term stopgap measure.’

The BCA says that the only approach for the future is a market based approach, but what we found really interesting was the contribution from ‘Professor’ Hunt of Flinders at the National Press Club yesterday—he who in his university thesis said the only approach for the future on climate change is a market based approach. Yesterday he got pushed on the question of whether this would be their permanent approach or whether it could possibly change in the future. The question asked of him was:

Does that mean you would consider a carbon price or a carbon market in that review, that would be on the table?

What the member for Flinders then goes on to say is, ‘Well, out there in the future, we would consider a market based system as a possible future arrangement.’ But it gets better, because the Leader of the Opposition has been asked about this as well. He was asked the other day:

Is the direct action plan—that is, his climate change con—
a package of interim measures until you get into something else later?

The Leader of the Opposition responds:

I wouldn’t ever say that it was the be all and end all. I would never say that, I’m not that full of myself.

So says the Leader of the Opposition. He later says that, as far as his direct action plan is concerned, it is a plan for the foreseeable future and that they would go on and have a review in 2015 which would take into account various factors.

So, out of the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition and out of the mouth of the shadow minister for the environment, we have them saying that this plan of theirs is a short-term, stopgap plan. It is an interim arrangement. They leave open the possibility not only of its review but of moving to a market based system. Therefore, based on the words of the Leader of the Opposition, in five years time they would review whether an ETS was desirable and, if it was okay at that time, they would then embrace it. Having just spent the last two months telling us that it is ‘this great big tax’, now they say that in five years time they might embrace this great big tax. Where is the consistency in that? They are seeking to negotiate one event alone and that is the upcoming election.

I say to those opposite that what the Australian people expect on climate change are people who are fair dinkum about it, who have a clear approach and one that works. What we have seen from those opposite is not only one that does less, costs more and is totally unfunded but one which they have a little insurance policy tucked in the closet for—going to an ETS after the next election were they to form the next government of Australia. That is what was said out of the shadow minister’s mouth and out of the Leader of the Opposition’s mouth. Those opposite do not wish to be upfront and fair dinkum with the Australian people. This government will be.

**Home Insulation Program**

Mr HUNT (2.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to the March 2009 National Electrical and Communications Association letter to him, the department’s response and his statement yesterday in question time that NECA were told in April last year that they would be ‘added to the stakeholder register as an organisation that could provide advice, consultation and information and, subsequent to that, they have participated in the consultation roundtables that I continue to hold’. Can the minister confirm that, in spite of his assurances in the House yesterday, NECA had no contact with the minister or the minister’s department until November, when NECA themselves contacted the minister’s department to find out why they had been excluded from the consultation process?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question. In relation to the series of negotiations and consultations that were undertaken by this department, my requirement was that the department was mindful of all relevant issues in relation to the delivery of the home installation program, including issues that related to electrical safety and that the views of organisations in relation to those matters ought to be taken into account as we continued to develop our training program. And that is what we did.

**Economy**

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How successful has the government been in protecting Australian jobs and has there been any commentary about Australia’s recent economic performance?

Mr RUDD—I am sure that all honourable members would welcome the fact that today
Australia’s unemployment rate fell to 5.3 per cent. This is good news for Australian working families and good news for all Australians interested in the protection of Australian jobs. The government’s objective is to keep the Australian economy strong by protecting jobs and supporting working families. It is an important fact that, since August 2009, 194,600 jobs have been created in Australia. This is a good number for the entire economy, for the nation and for all families concerned about the security of their jobs. That is why Australia has been doing so much better than most other economies around the world. The protection of jobs is a big challenge for governments everywhere, but we have seen in the last period of time nearly seven million jobs lost in the United States, nearly half a million lost in the UK, 136,000 jobs lost in Germany, 270,000 lost in Canada and a million lost in Japan. By contrast, Australia has gained nearly 200,000 jobs over the last year. That is where we have stood as the direct product of the economic policy of the government in partnership with the Australian private sector, which has had their sleeves rolled up out there providing real project opportunities in the field.

The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that it was not worth keeping Australia out of recession. He said the following on radio:

… it’s all very well saying oh, yeah, but we’ve kept Australia out of recession. Well, fine, but did you really have to waste money to do so?

The lesson of the Great Depression, the lesson of the eighties and the lesson of the nineties is that, when the private sector is under stress, when it is in retreat, the role of government is to step up to the plate to keep the economy working, to keep the wheels of the economy turning, so that there is activity to generate opportunities and small business, to ensure that firms are still taking on apprentices and to keep everything out there as active as we possibly can. The Leader of the Opposition has added to his remarks on this today. He said:

… there are other countries which have chosen a different path and there’s no evidence that their response has been any less effective than ours. For instance, in New Zealand …

Let us have a little look at the numbers on New Zealand. The New Zealand economy has contracted for five consecutive quarters. This is the longest recession New Zealand has had since their quarterly series began in 1987—that is, 23 years ago. The New Zealand economy has shrunk 2.9 per cent since the end of 2007; the Australian economy has grown by 2.6 per cent since the end of 2007. That is a difference of 5.3 per cent. This is the model to which the Leader of the Opposition draws our attention. He says they have done it better. That is his definition of better: much higher unemployment. Let us have a look at what that would mean for Australia. New Zealand’s unemployment rate has risen from 4.3 per cent in September 2008 to 7.3 per cent in December 2009. Our unemployment rate was 4.3 per cent in September 2008 and has risen by three times less.

If Australia’s growth had been the same as New Zealand’s during the global recession, we would have had five quarters of negative growth and we would have an additional 230,000 people out of work. That is the model advocated to us on national radio today by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of Opposition has made a quick grab for some example or analogy—some way to get out of a difficult question in an interview—and has picked on a country like New Zealand and has said that is the way we should go. We know there is a conservative government in New Zealand. I suppose that is the first instinct for his response.

He said that they have done just as well as we have at less cost. But 230,000 people
would have lost their jobs by pursuing that benchmark for analysis. No wonder people are concluding that the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer and the shadow finance minister represent a risk to Australian jobs—because they do. It goes to the hard question of the future of policy. They say we should withdraw the stimulus. If we withdrew the stimulus for 2010-11, with the biggest infrastructure program in the country’s history rolling through our schools, it would detract 2½ percentage points from growth, and that would be 200,000 jobs down the gurgler.

That is what they are advocating. They are not just advocating New Zealand as an alternative model, not just 230,000 jobs down the gurgler; they are actively now suggesting a new course of action for the future: cancel the stimulus package and on top of that put at risk 200,000 Australian jobs. It is no wonder people have decided that those opposite represent a capital-R risk. The Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer and, most importantly, the shadow finance minister represent the worst economic frontbench team that the Liberal-National Party has put forward in their history.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to revelations last night, which were finally confirmed by him in parliament today, that he was warned by state authorities in April last year about the dangers of using metal fasteners in the home insulation program. Given this warning in April last year, why did the minister wait until November—a delay of more than six months—before banning the use of metal fasteners?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question. I refer the honourable member to the answer that I gave to the question when it was asked previously in this House, and also to the statement I gave this afternoon. That statement makes it perfectly clear that, upon notice being given to me of the likely dangers posed in ceiling insulation as a consequence of the use of metal fasteners, I acted in an immediate and direct way. Having made that statement clearly here in the parliament, I refer the honourable member to it, and I conclude by saying that, when the issue of foil insulation in ceilings was directly raised with me as a minister in consideration of the safe delivery of this program, I took the necessary steps, including the banning of metal fasteners and, subsequent to that, the suspension of the program as a consequence of the advice I had received.

Economy

Mr NEUMANN (2.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Why is it important to ensure accuracy in public debate regarding fiscal policy in government programs?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Blair for his question. It is important to ensure accuracy in public debate regarding fiscal policy and government programs. As members may recall, I have made a number of critical comments in recent days with respect to some contributions by my opposite number, Senator Barnaby Joyce, with respect to some of the claims he has made in public debate about fiscal policy and government programs—for example, his suggestion a couple of days ago that it was possible that Australia might default on its debts. Therefore, I was delighted to wake up this morning and see in today’s Australian that the Leader of the Opposition had intervened in the cause of accuracy in public debate on fiscal policy and government programs.

According to the Australian this morning, he and Senator Minchin paid Senator Joyce
a ‘friendly visit’ a couple of nights ago—the kind of friendly visit that is usually associated with violin cases, roses and things like that. As a result of this friendly visit, Senator Joyce told the Australian:

“Tony told me there was a campaign directed against me … “

and:

“It was friendly,” Senator Joyce said. “He said I needed to be aware there is a campaign directed against me.”

He is pretty quick on the uptake, the old Senator Joyce! That, at least, I would consider a good start, because, in situations like this, the first step is acknowledging you have a problem. The next step may be somewhat more difficult, because he will have to work out why this campaign is happening.

I was encouraged by this report and I foolishly commented to one of my staff, ‘Perhaps today would be a gaffe-free day for Senator Joyce’. A few hours went by and I was looking good. But, sadly, I proved to be wrong, because on the doors Senator Joyce alleged that the government’s solar panels program had blown out to the tune of $850 billion. Once again, he has got his trillions and his millions and his billions mixed up. Anyone can make a slip of the tongue but, unfortunately, this is becoming a habit with Senator Joyce, and this is a very serious issue.

As the Treasurer and I know only too well, the accuracy and the responsibility of statements that are made by the nation’s treasurer and finance minister are critical. They can influence market behaviour. They can influence investor decisions. They can influence the confidence of other nations and the confidence of international investors in the Australian economy. All that ultimately flows through into two things: jobs and economic activity in the Australian economy.

If we were to have a shambolic, incoherent, undisciplined finance minister like Senator Joyce, that would put at risk the Australian economy and Australian jobs. The Leader of the Opposition’s appointment of Senator Joyce, his continued support for him and allowing him to be the de facto No.1 economic spokesman for the coalition shows why he is a risk to the Australian economy, why he is a risk to Australian jobs and why he is not worthy of the trust of the Australian people.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (2.23 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to his confirmation on Tuesday that mandatory training standards for all insulation installers will commence from this Friday, 12 February 2010. Can the minister confirm that the ElectroComms and Energy Utilities Industry Skills Council wrote to his department in March 2009—which was not mentioned in today’s statement—to raise concerns about the lack of electrical training for insulation installers? Given these legitimate and credible concerns subsequently borne out by the tragic loss of four young Australians, why did it take almost a full year for this action to occur?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question and I refer him to the statement that I made in the House earlier today. I amplify that statement by pointing out the process that I went through in order to determine the appropriate level of training for the installation of insulation. Up until such time as this program began to be rolled out through Australia and installers started installing insulation, there was no nationally accredited training module at all.

I have introduced that but I have done it in the proper way. I have done it with full consultation with the relevant state bodies and
the training organisations, and I have brought forward a module for training on the basis of the advice that I have received from my department that it meets the goals that the government has for risks and the appropriate level of training. I have always said about this program that insulating over a million homes is a significant exercise by any measure—and that is what this government has done—and that if there additional issues that required addressing over time then I would address them. Regarding the nationally accredited training model that was brought forward for the first time by this government, significant additional advice to me showed that the potential for an additional level of training ought to be contemplated by me. I took that advice and I brought it to bear.

I conclude on one other matter in reference to the question previously asked of me by the honourable member. I am pleased to note the media release from NECA today welcoming the safety inspections and the ‘announcement by Minister Garrett to immediately conduct’ those inspections:

It is pleasing that Minister Garrett has now acted on our advice and households will be able to engage a licensed electrician to conduct a safety inspection, and, where required, rectify any identified faults.

**Employment**

Ms BURKE (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the employment data released this morning and what it says about Australia’s economic performance?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question. I think today’s employment figures are a tribute to the resilience of the Australian economy and to the hard work that employers and employees have done in extremely difficult circumstances over the past 12 months. They really are something special because, in the circumstances in which this country has found itself in over the last 12 months, to have created over 180,000 jobs is something very special. What it says a lot about is the impact of the stimulus. It says a lot about the resilience of our employers and the hard work of our employees. What we particularly celebrate about these figures today is the thought that 52,700 Australians have told their families in January that they got a job. Nothing is more important to somebody’s security than the certainty of their employment and the knowledge that they have a pay packet.

What has driven this government, particularly from the beginning of this global recession, has been jobs. It has been at the centre of everything that we have done in the economy. What it has meant is that when employment in other countries such as United States, such as Canada and many other countries was going backwards at a rate of knots, here we achieved such a special outcome for our country.

Mr Tuckey—No you didn’t. The Chinese did that.

Mr SWAN—It just shows you what little priority those opposite give to jobs. Those sorts of interjections just demonstrate the fundamental misjudgments and misrepresentations that are coming from those opposite, particularly when it comes to economic policy. That comment just demonstrates how wrong the Liberal Party got its response to this global recession by because, if it had not been for the stimulus that was put in place, this country would be in recession. Instead of growing by 0.6 per cent in the year through to September we would have gone backwards by two per cent and we would be standing here today talking about far higher unemployment.

But, of course, those opposite have so misunderstood the economy, so misunderstood the global economy, that they are a
threat to future employment and investment in this country. As the Prime Minister said before, we had the Leader of the Opposition out saying on radio that saving jobs was a waste of money. Well, go and tell that to all of the Australians who are in jobs as a result of the stimulus. Go and tell that to all of the small businesses whose stores are still open as a result of the stimulus. But of course those opposite are masters of misrepresentation and masters of misjudgment, and no misjudgment is more fundamental than the misjudgment that the Leader of the Opposition made when he appointed Barnaby Joyce to the role of shadow finance spokesman. This was summed up in an article in the "Courier Mail" on 8 February by Tim Hughes, who writes a regular economic column. I do not think he is normally a friend to the government, but this is what he had to say:

What does it say about Abbott when he puts Joyce into the second-most unsuited portfolio for him? … To me it suggests that Abbott thinks the economy is a joke. Either that or he simply does not understand the serious responsibilities of government.

He went on to say:

Abbott made the appointment and, in so doing, has effectively disqualified himself from running our economy. Australia’s long-term future depends on a strong rate of investment and much of the funding for that investment comes from offshore.

That brings me back to Mr Joyce, because Mr Joyce has been out there campaigning against foreign investment—campaigning against the arrangements the government has put in place to make sure that we protect the national interests of this country through the Foreign Investment Review Board. It is a fact that one in four jobs in mining in regional Australia depend on foreign investment, and Mr Joyce has been campaigning right around this country against that foreign investment. But, of course, he let the cat out of the bag at the Press Club earlier this week, when he admitted that he had been flying around the country with Clive Palmer, the biggest recipient of the foreign investment in this country that is creating jobs. What that says is that Mr Joyce has one standard when he is in the front bar of the pub in Roma or somewhere like that and entirely another when he is in the plane with Clive Palmer at 30,000 feet, sipping a scotch. What that shows is just how short-term—how opportunistic—these people are. There is not a principle that they adhere to, and that is why they are such a massive risk to our economy.

**Home Insulation Program**

**Mr HUNT** (2.32 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer the minister to the audit conducted by his own department that has found a real danger of electrocution exists right now in potentially a thousand family homes across Australia and the minister’s announcement yesterday that in response he would be setting up a hotline and writing to all homes at risk. I also refer to the warning yesterday from Master Electricians Australia spokesman Mr Paul Daly:

Do not go into your ceiling space for any reason. Unfortunately, householders may die.

Given that Mr Daly understands the immediacy of the danger, why did the minister delay taking action despite repeated warnings since as early as March last year, putting households and workers at serious risk?

**Mr GARRETT**—I thank the honourable member for his question. As he knows, in the statement that I brought forward to the House prior to question time these matters were canvassed in some detail. I will add to that statement by saying the following. The requirements for the safe installation of insulation were always a key component of the rollout of this program. They are a component that exists within state regulations as
well. They are a component that exists within occupational health and safety requirements, which are compulsory under the Home Insulation Program.

It is also the case that, of the range of issues that were identified, safety issues and otherwise, in the early processes of consultation with my department and relevant authorities, all of those matters were taken into account and a training module brought forward which would deal with it satisfactorily. Additionally, in relation to the matter concerning foil insulation, I repeat what I said in my statement to the House and I add that it was only as a consequence of my decision to ban metal fasteners that the necessary step was taken to ensure that, where installers breached the existing guidelines under the program, they would not in any way, by virtue of their negligence, be able to place any householders at risk.

The honourable member brings the question to me about the current state of households and ceiling insulation and safety. I make the point to him that the decision I took to have a 10 per cent sample audit of ceilings with foil insulation in Queensland was as a consequence of the issues that had been raised and that that particular audit process, in its preliminary stages, has identified additional risks in ceilings that are not a consequence of the Home Insulation Program. It is the case that this particular issue, identified by me, was dealt with by me at the time on the advice that I had from my department and put the necessary safety measures in place for the rollout of the program.

Employment

**Mr CHAMPION** (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. What has been the effect of the federal government’s stimulus plan on Australian jobs?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for Wakefield for his question. I know that in his electorate he knows what it is like to see families struggle with unemployment and why he therefore would have been particularly welcoming of today’s news that unemployment has fallen by 0.2 per cent to 5.3 per cent in January. I have to say that I think it is quite remarkable that, when the Prime Minister first mentioned this figure in question time today, on this side of the House we saw welcoming and enthusiasm for that result. On the other side of the House we saw a stony-faced silence, because the opposition would have preferred it had the numbers been worse.

What these unemployment results are telling us is that the number of people employed in January increased by 52,700 to 10.966 million, and that is the largest increase in employment since December 2006. For the third consecutive month the Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported the number of people unemployed has decreased, down 22,300 persons to 612,000 in January. We should remind ourselves that, if we compare this unemployment result with the start of the global financial crisis, we can see that 124,500 Australians more are unemployed today than at the start of the global financial crisis. So there are Australians we want to support through economic stimulus and through the economy to get the benefits of work. It is also crystal clear that, if not for economic stimulus, unemployment would have been 1½ percentage points higher and we would have seen more than 200,000 extra Australians out of work.

If we compare where our Australian economy is with results overseas as economies around the world show the impact of the global financial crisis, we know that in the US, four million jobs were lost; in Japan, 1.3 million jobs; in the UK, more than 400,000 jobs; in France, more than 300,000 jobs; in
Italy, more than 300,000 jobs; and the list goes on. Consequently, when we look at the situation in Australia, we can see economic stimulus at work—the economic stimulus that we have provided through our nation building programs including the Building the Education Revolution program. Let us hear this in the words of people who employ others and who know what is happening out on the ground. Joe Cachia, the managing director of Piruse Constructions, said

Without the stimulus money, the building industry is dead. In the next two or three months it will generate a lot more work. I’ve no doubt about that.

David Rees, the Australian head of research for Jones Lang LaSalle said:

The federal government stimulus package, particularly the fiscal stimulus directed towards schools, is filling the hole left by private investment.

Steve Marais, the director of Condev Construction said:

As a growing company we have a large database of tradespeople who will benefit from the roll-out of the contracts.

We know that if the Leader of the Opposition and Senator Barnaby Joyce had been in the cabinet room when the global financial crisis hit, there would have been no economic stimulus, no employer would have uttered these words and we would have seen the Australian economy go into recession with more than 200,000 more Australians out of work.

Even in opposition, not having learnt that lesson, the Leader of the Opposition is threatening these vital stimulus projects even today. In doing so, he is threatening the biggest school modernisation program the nation has ever seen, but he is also threatening the jobs of working Australians who are delivering that economic stimulus. It just goes to show that for the Leader of the Opposition economics might be boring, but it is vital to working families who depend on the economy and the government’s management of it for work.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. I refer to the opposition’s letter to the Auditor-General of 27 August 2009 requesting an urgent and comprehensive inquiry into the conduct and dangerous work practices under the Homeowner Insulation Program. Did the minister or his department indicate in any way that the Auditor-General should not or need not bring forward than inquiry into the Homeowner Insulation Program?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the honourable member for his question. He would be well aware that there are appropriate guidelines in place in relation to communications between departments and the Auditor-General. They will have been followed in this case. That is my expectation. That is what I believe would have happened.

Mr Hunt—I seek leave to table the Auditor-General’s reply, which refers to clear consultation as to why he did not bring forward an inquiry.

Leave not granted.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Parliamentary standards would suggest that people should be sitting quietly at this stage. I call member for Leichhardt.

Closing the Gap

Mr TURNOUR (2.42 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery. What is the government doing to close the gap in Indigenous health?

Mr SNOWDON—I thank the member for Leichhardt for his question. He is someone
with a keen interest in and knowledge of the issues to do with closing the gap in life expectancy for Indigenous Australians. This afternoon the Prime Minister delivered the second report, Closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. It was a very important occasion—a milestone in establishing where we are now and laying down markers for the future. As the Prime Minister made very clear, we are not standing still.

Despite the comments from the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution, we are taking action. This is demonstrated by the 57 per cent increase in funding for Indigenous health since the Rudd government came to office. Australian governments have committed $1.6 billion through COAG towards closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. As part of that package, $805.5 million—the Commonwealth contribution—is to address chronic disease within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

I just want to make this observation; it is very important that it is understood. Chronic disease—such things as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and lung cancer—accounts for two-thirds of premature deaths amongst Indigenous Australians. The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package will improve the prevention, early detection and ongoing management of these diseases.

In addition, through the COAG early childhood development agreement, the government is committed, as the Prime Minister reminded us this afternoon, to halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade. As the Prime Minister reminded us, Indigenous kids are twice as likely to die before the age of five as other Australian children. That, of course, is a tragedy—one I am only too well aware of because of the large Indigenous population in my electorate. I know the member for Leichhardt is aware of this detail from his work in his electorate. A significant contributor to this appalling situation is the prevalence of underweight babies, who are at greater risk of dying during the first year of life and are prone to ill health in childhood. It is our responsibility to support Indigenous babies and their mothers and ensure that they have the best possible care throughout the pregnancy and the first crucial years of life.

Along with Minister Macklin, this morning I visited the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service here in Canberra, where we were able to announce the funding of 10 new mothers and babies services across the country under the New Directions program. As the Prime Minister said in his Close the Gap speech, under the $90.3 million mothers and babies services program a total of 11,000 mothers and babies will be supported over five years with services including improved antenatal and postnatal care, advice on nutrition and health checks. This adds to the 43 Indigenous child and maternity services already in place.

It is very, very important that we understand that, despite the rhetoric that came from the Leader of the Opposition in his response to the Prime Minister’s speech, we are deadly serious about addressing issues to do with closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Far from just being a matter of words, as it was described by the Leader of the Opposition, we are delivering not on words but on taking action—definitive action which is there for all to see. I say to members of the chamber and, indeed, people who might be listening to this discussion: take a look at the Prime Minister’s speech this morning to understand precisely what the government is doing to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
Home Insulation Program

Mr ABBOTT (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister agree with his finance minister that the Home Insulation Program, which has contributed to the deaths of four Australians, was a program where the government could not be expected to dot the i’s and cross the t’s?

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: it is not in order for the Leader of the Opposition to verbal the finance minister in a question. Therefore the premise of the question is incorrect and therefore the question is out of order.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The chair is not in a position to vouch for the accuracy of quotes contained within questions. On all occasions, these matters are left in the hands of the person that is asking the question, and the remedial action open to any aggrieved party is well known by members of the House.

Mr Tuckey—Hear, hear! Well said!

Mr Rudd—The SPEAKER—Order! The second Thursday is not the time to make the comment, ‘I now will review what I just said,’ but!

Mr Rudd—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I have not seen the remarks by the finance minister to which he refers. I am just responding to the question which has been asked by the Leader of the Opposition. The sequence of any such decision as taken by this government is (1) to obtain the policy design for a program (2) to finance it as appropriate and (3) to adhere to the administrative protocols and arrangements which go with the decision. I also draw the Leader of the Opposition’s attention to the statement made to the House by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts concerning those implementation arrangements, and I would encourage the Leader of the Opposition to study the minister’s statement very carefully.

Health

Mr ADAMS (2.51 pm)—My question—

Government members interjecting—

Mr Secker interjecting—

The SPEAKER—He might have if the minister had not made the comments. The member for Barker knows he has a responsibility to show some decorum as a member of the club that is known by the name of the Speaker’s panel, and he is warned.

Mr ADAMS—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. What investments has the government made in the health workforce, and how is this an improvement on past practices?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Lyons for his question, because he has very high demands from his constituents on health matters—as does the community in Tasmania, where workforce issues are more challenging than in other parts of the country. We know that one of the problems when the Rudd government was elected was that we inherited an extraordinary legacy, following the Leader of the Opposition’s period as the health minister, of workforce shortages that were at crises points. We had nationwide medical workforce shortages stretching across 74 per cent of the country and affecting 60 per cent of the population, capped GP training places at 600 and a nationwide shortage of about 6,000 nurses. These were the good old days that the Leader of the Opposition is pining for.

But try telling that to the outer suburban families who could not get into the see a GP because the GP’s books were closed or the regional communities who had lost their only doctor in town. Under the Leader of the Opposition the good old days were days where
the family GP became an endangered species. But we took immediate action to address this chronic problem. Since 2007 we have been training more GP’s than ever before—and, rather than leaving it to chance like the Liberal Party did, we have a plan in place to train the future health workforce in Australia.

So, in addition to training over 800 GP’s—a 35 per cent increase from the time the Leader of the Opposition was the health minister—we have also increased the number of places for junior doctors to experience working in general practice settings by 10 per cent and we are investing $1.1 billion in clinical training for doctors, nurses and other health professionals. This is the single-biggest investment that an Australian government has ever made in the workforce. More students are going to receive quality clinical training as health professionals, and of course that means over time that Australians, not just in the seat of Lyons in Tasmania but across the country, will find it easier to get the healthcare professionals that they need.

Tomorrow I will be meeting with the states’ health ministers in a dedicated health ministers conference dealing with workforce issues where I will be asking and encouraging—in fact, requiring—them to sign onto additional commitments in the workforce arena. This of course is in stark contrast to the leader opposite, who basically said the system was not broken. His direct quote was, ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’. But everybody knows that his response to the lack of access to medical care for families was to cap GP places. His response to 750 public hospitals suffering, after he ripped $1 billion out of the public hospital system, was to pick one winner, the Mersey Hospital in Tasmania, and forget about all the rest. His sneaky spin to explain away a $1 billion funding cut was to call it a ‘reduction in the forward estimates’.

And his response to one of 650,000 Australians on the public dental waiting list, after his government axed the program, was to lament that he ‘did not have a magic wand to solve the problem’.

Ms Gillard—He should have asked Joe Hockey for one of those!

Ms ROXON—Exactly! I did wonder whether maybe that magic wand had been found. Of course, the shadow Treasurer is storing it somewhere with his tutu and crown. No doubt the Leader of the Opposition will be able to ask for that magic wand to fix and fund all of those uncosted promises. He might be able to use the magic wand to convince the shadow finance minister what the difference is between a million and a billion dollars!

Mr Swan—He could use it on Barnaby!

Ms ROXON—He might be able to use that magic wand for all sorts of useful purposes in the shadow ministry.

Mr Dutton—On your broomstick, Nicola!

Ms ROXON—But the serious point here is that the Leader of the Opposition has a legacy: he neglected the health workforce needs of the country. Every member on the other side knows this, because they are the people who write to me everyday about their shortage of doctors. They can thank their leader for that problem. Luckily, we are starting to fix it.

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister?

Ms Gillard—Thank you very much. I heard the member over there—the current member for Dickson—make a grossly unparliamentary remark and I ask that it be withdrawn.

The SPEAKER—There appeared to be a very definite reaction to something, so I
would ask the member for Dickson to withdraw.

**Mr Dutton**—I withdraw.

**The SPEAKER**—I thank the member for Dickson.

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts**

**Mr ABBOTT** (2.57 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given the minister for the environment’s bungled handling of Japanese whaling, $850 million blow out in the Solar Homes program, collapsed Green Loans scheme and, most damning of all, his failure to heed credible warnings and take timely action to protect lives during the roll-out of his home insulation program, does the Prime Minister still have confidence in the minister for the environment?

**Mr RUDD**—Both myself and the government have full confidence in the minister for the environment. The reason we have full confidence in the minister is that he has been a first-class minister. I draw the honourable member’s attention to the statement which has been made available to the House by the minister and his response to the various matters that have been raised in this debate. I would again ask the Leader of the Opposition, who is notorious for not looking at the detail of things, to actually examine the detail of that before he engages in a wider debate.

The Leader of the Opposition’s broader question goes to the performance of the minister for the environment. Can I say that why I have said that the minister for the environment has been a first-class minister for the environment is as follows: this minister has been out there engaged in ensuring that Australian working families have assistance with things like solar panels on their roofs to make a real difference in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and energy home prices—120,000 solar panels have gone out in two years or more. I would contrast that with the 12 years of when those opposite were in power, when they paid a total of 10,500 rebates—10,500 solar rebates in their 12 years; in the period we have been in office, 120,000 solar panels. Mr Speaker, if you want a clear contrast of the performance of the government versus the opposition on a clear program which aims to assist working families put solar panels on their roofs, that is No. 1.

I draw the honourable member’s attention to what the minister has done in relation to the National Solar Schools Program as well: 2,400 Australian schools have already been approved and over 850 installations already confirmed. The minister has also been engaged in the proper regulation and dissemination of regulatory material concerning incandescent light bulbs, the proper energy rating of energy appliances and the practical matters which fall within the province of a minister for the environment.

What we have learnt so far about the Leader of the Opposition is that the Leader of the Opposition asks a question like this not in order to obtain an answer. The Leader of the Opposition has not bothered to read the full statement which has been provided by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts before question time; the Leader of the Opposition has asked his question because it is Thursday, it is question number 7 and it is time for the censure motion.

It does not matter what day of the week it is, we warm up for the censure motion. So we see the forensic attack by the member for Flinders: questions one, two, three, four, five, six; the responses to each of those given in detail by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts; no progress being made; and so we wheel in the Leader of the Opposition to up the ante a bit and add
some theatre. I expect the Leader of the Opposition will now move his motion, or whatever he is going to move. Can I say firstly in response to the Leader of the Opposition’s question: the minister, in his statement earlier to the House, goes through in detail the issues concerning this particular matter. Secondly, the Leader of the Opposition asked a question about his performance as minister more generally, and I have responded to the minister’s performance in general.

I conclude this answer where I began: I and the government have full confidence in the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

PRIME MINISTER
Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.01 pm)—I seek leave to move a motion of censure of 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 from moving immediately—

That this House censures the Prime Minister for failing to remove his Minister who has now received no fewer than 13 separate warnings of fire and safety risks associated with the Government’s Home Insulation Program, over a 12 month period, that has now cost the taxpayer millions, homeowners their safety and, most regrettably, four young Australians their lives; and

(1) in particular for:

(a) the Prime Minister’s failure to uphold his own standards of ministerial ethics, that Ministers must, and I quote, “accept the full implications of the principle of ministerial responsibility”; and

(b) failing to act to remove his Minister after Mr Garrett received urgent and repeated warnings in relation to fire and electrocution risk from the National Electrical and Communications Association, EE OZ, the Master Electricians of Australia, the Insulation Council of Australia and New Zealand, Archicentre, South Australian Labor Minister, Ms Gail Gago MP, NSW Labor Minister, Mr Steve Whan, state and territory fair trading agencies, the WA Department of Commerce and others;

(2) but most of all for allowing his incompetent minister lay the blame for his own dereliction of ministerial responsibility at the feet of installers by saying on ABC radio this morning, “It’s negligent or inappropriate, slack behaviour on the part of a very tiny minority”, rather than his own failures, that has seen tragedy unfold under his watch. Prime Minister he must go.

This program has been a total shambles from the beginning. But this motion today is not about the waste; it is not about the backpackers who are recruited by bodgie installers; it is not about the pink batts that have been dumped by the roadside because of the complete shambles of this program; it is not, in the end, even about the detail of his administration—this is about death: the deaths of four young Australians flowing from the maladministration of this portfolio by this incompetent minister.

What we have seen in question time today is a complete derangement of values by government ministers led by the Prime Minister. Here we have a government program from which four deaths have flowed—four young Australians have died from events arising from a government program—and all they can talk about is Senator Joyce. It is a complete disgrace and a sign of the complete loss of a grip on reality by this Prime Minister that is all he is interested in—trying to score political points about a few misstatements, rather than worrying about the maladministration of a program that has actually resulted in people dying. That is why this is important, and that is why it is so gut-
less of this Prime Minister to leave the chamber rather than face up to the consequences of his incompetent minister and his failed programs.

I did listen to the minister’s statement in the parliament, and he said he did take action. The action he took was all on paper—he took no action out there in our streets. He took no action that would protect the workers working in the roof cavities in this country, four of whom have died because he was satisfied with paper solutions. He did not go out and insist on real solutions.

He also said in his statement today that he acted on advice. I say to this minister, ‘You cannot hide behind officials.’ It is ministers who must take responsibility under the Westminster conventions when their programs do not work. Particularly when, flowing from their maladministered program are four deaths. The basic problem here is that this government wanted to get insulation into two million homes in a matter of months and they did not care what it took. They wanted to get the money out the door.

Mr Hockey—Dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s!

Mr ABBOTT—Why bother about dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s, as the shadow minister for finance said, when all you have got to do is get the money out of the door? The direct consequences of getting the money out of the door in a program that was completely maladministered and effectively unregulated is that four Australians have died. That is the truth.

The minister says, ‘It’s all the fault of the shonks.’ I say to the minister there were always going to be shonks in a program like this. As the minister for finance has admitted, that was built into the program. They expected shonks out there and they did not care about the undotted i’s and the uncrossed t’s. The environment minister was warned not once, not twice but repeatedly. He was warned on at least 13 separate occasions and he took no effective action. The first specific warning was back on 9 March last year, when the authoritative body, the national electrical association, warned of the inherent dangers. So concerned by this warning was this minister that it took seven weeks for these reputable and concerned experts to get even a pro-forma, fob-off departmental reply, promising of course that they were going to be consulted. But they then heard absolutely nothing.

Then in October there is the first death. The first death comes in October because the minister has failed to heed that warning. On 16 October the master electricians association calls for the suspension of this program—no training programs, no issuing of new guidelines and standards, but the suspension of this program because there was the risk that it would kill people. So what does the minister do? On 1 November he bans metal clips. The warnings kept coming and the deaths kept coming. He gets a warning on 26 November, a press release from the national electrical association. We have raised, this press release says:

… concerns of the risk of serious injury, death or house fires …

We have warned, this press release says:

… governments and consumers on a number of occasions in recent months of the dangers associated with installing insulation in roof cavities where cabling is present.

Listen to this, Mr Speaker:
The recent Federal Government stimulus package measures have exacerbated these problems without the establishment of adequate enforceable inspection safety measures and placed home owners and occupiers in serious danger.

This is what this minister has failed to do: he has failed to protect installers and home occupiers from serious danger.
After that public warning there were three more deaths. Three months went past before finally he took action to suspend the foil insulation program. It is just not good enough. As a result of this minister’s incompetence 37,000 houses have had this foil insulation installed and over 1,000 of them, according to his own departmental audit, are now electrified. We have live houses, houses that are a potential risk to their occupiers because of the ineptitude of this minister, and he thinks none of this is his fault. If he was a company director in New South Wales he would be charged with industrial manslaughter. That is the truth.

The Prime Minister obviously does not want to lose this minister. He does not want to lose this minister after a very bad fortnight. I can understand why he does not want to lose this minister. But it shows a complete lack of any sense of proportion that he is standing by this minister, who has presided over four deaths. Instead of talking about this minister he would rather talk about Senator Barnaby Joyce. I have to say, Barnaby Joyce has not been responsible for programs that have killed people. That is the truth. That is why this minister must go. He might give doorstop interviews outside church, but this Prime Minister has completely lost any sense of values. This minister deserves to go and the Prime Minister should censure him. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (3.11 pm)—I second the motion. Let me be clear from the outset that under every principle of Westminster government the environment minister deserves to go. We have a government that is in denial about 1,000 electrified roofs, a government that is in denial about the tragic human consequences of a program and a government that is in denial about at least 13 different warnings from credible authorities. That is why this minister deserves to go. These results came about directly because of a program which was put in place, which was not audited, about which there were warnings and about which the key things were ignored.

Let me set out very briefly, so the House knows, the 13 different occasions on which this minister ignored his fundamental duties. The duty of a minister and of a government is to protect their citizens, not to endanger them. On 9 March we know that the CEO of the National Electrical and Communications Association warned the minister in a direct letter, which was only dragged out of him yesterday, that there were real and inherent risks. Beyond that, in March of 2009 EE-Oz, the union trainers, wrote to the minister’s department. They also warned of dangers. They also warned of the need for action. On 2 April, in something which was not acknowledged today in the minister’s statement, the South Australian Minister for State/Local Government Relations, Gail Gago, also warned about risks under his program in terms of human safety.

Most damningly, in an item which was neglected from his answer yesterday, on 29 April there was a teleconference between state and territory fair trading agencies which warned about the program being effectively unregulated and which protested at the risk of loss of human life. But it goes beyond that. On 18 May there was a media release by Master Electricians Australia entitled ‘Insulation scheme prompts timely fire safety warning’. And there were more warnings. On 16 June the Western Australian government warned of the fire dangers of roof insulation and warned more generally of real risks under the program.

On 16 October in a letter from Master Electricians Australia to Mr Garrett, not ac-
knowledged previously prior to today, we know that the minister was warned of the risk of death—‘further fatalities’ were the exact words—if the program was not withdrawn for foil batts. There was no qualification: withdraw the program for foil batts or face the risk of ‘further fatalities’. That was a tragic warning, and that foresight was ignored with fatal consequences. We know also that on 16 October, Master Electricians Australia put out a press release to that effect, again not acknowledged today in the statement.

On 20 October, Master Electricians Australia met with the minister. On 23 October, the National Electrical and Communications Association warned of the dangers of fire and other risks in installing insulation. In 27 October, there was an all-industry meeting with his department—again warnings were given. On 4 November, there was a meeting with the department between the National Electrical and Communications Association. Then on 18 November, the New South Wales Labor minister for emergency services and consumer affairs referred to ongoing fire safety concerns around poorly installed installation.

Throughout this process, as the minister was silent, as the minister was inactive and as the minister was passive in the face of the most prominent warnings a minister of the Crown could receive, the opposition made it clear that there were real issues. We called for an Auditor-General’s inquiry on 26 August last year, before any lives were lost. We called for an Auditor-General’s inquiry on 27 August last year, before any lives were lost. We called for an urgent and comprehensive Auditors-General’s inquiry on 28 August last year, before any lives were lost—and again on 7 September, again on 6 October and again on 10 October, all before a single life was lost.

This is a minister who had forewarning not just once, twice, or three or four times, but on 13 occasions. He had approaches from us on multiple occasions. This is a minister who failed the Australian public in the most derelict way who must go and who has breached every Westminster principle of responsibility, and the Prime Minister must be censured for failing to do the right thing. (Time expired)

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts) (3.17 pm)—The government does not agree with this motion. I want to begin by reprising the statement that I already made to the House, outlining in some detail the approach that I have taken in terms of the discharge of this program, ensuring there were appropriate levels of training in place and also that safety at all times was a priority.

I am going to begin, though, by addressing the remarks from the member for Flinders. I come to the dispatch box with correspondence that has come to my attention in relation to the Audit Office—and I have already addressed this in the parliament today. I think it is understood by most of us here that the executive does not direct the Auditor-General in this parliament and neither should it. On that basis, though, the Auditor-General did write to me confirming that he had received a letter from the shadow minister for climate change, asking that he give consideration to an inquiry into the package, particularly the Homeowner Insulation Program. The Auditor-General goes on to say:

Prior to receiving Mr Hunt’s letter, we had already planned an audit of this package to commence towards the end of this financial year. In the light of this correspondence, we consulted with your department on developments of the new program. In this context, we were informed of the new guidelines and the compliance and audit strategy being implemented for the pro-
gram. If implemented effectively these resources may address some of the concerns raised by the shadow minister. Given that the package is at an early phase of implementation, I have decided not to advance our existing plan of commencing the audit towards the end of this financial year.

When this program was first announced by the government, it was announced with a specific purpose and it was announced in the framework of existing state regulations about occupational health and safety and work safety that would be brought into effect in the event that there was any delivery of ceiling insulation into the homes of Australia. It is important that we recognise that fact from the outset. My absolute desire and very firm commitment has been to ensure that the existing standards that Australia had in place, as a modern democratic state, for activities of this kind were properly reflected in the guidelines that we established to develop the program and to ensure that if there were any additional measures that needed to be addressed and implemented then we would, with careful consultation and with due consideration, taking on board expert advice and consulting with the industry as a whole, make those necessary additional steps. That is what we have done.

This motion fails on a number of bases but at its very heart does not recognise what the government’s program has actually done. I have made a detailed statement to the House. It is the case that the opposition always took an alternative view to this program. They were not going to support the fiscal stimulus package and they have been particularly patronising about the insulation industry and the installation of the pink batts—you often hear it shouted across the chamber. But the fact remains that the initial rollout of this program was consistent with the Australian standards as necessary, and that upon the full rollout of this program, following on from consultations with all of the relevant bodies that the government ought to have negotiated and consulted with at that time, a nationally accredited training module was put in place—not only that but also a register for installers.

The shadow minister referred to one particular matter, claiming that this shows the neglect that I as minister showed in discharging my duties in relation to warnings that we have had about electrical safety. He referred specifically to EE-Oz. I want to take this opportunity to advise the House of advice that I have received in respect of that matter—that is, that EE-Oz requested minimal changes to the pocketbook that installers use and that the CEO of EE-Oz stated that the relevant information relating to electrical safety was covered. It is important to understand this point, because what I have had to do over the last week is amplify the level of safety requirements under an existing program which already has safety requirements above the Australian standard and greater than is required by the building codes of Australia. That is the situation that we found ourselves in as a consequence of the tragic death on 14 October.

As I pointed out in my statement to the parliament earlier today, I did not accept the advice of my department and I did go on to ban the use of metal fasteners, considering those issues that were in play. At the same time as doing that, I demanded that we audit the ceilings of homes in Queensland where this foil had been installed. I wanted to know what the results of that audit would be. When I got those interim results in the very first instance—they dribbled through to us—and five instances out of the early 400 interim results showed prospectivity for live insulation, I suspended the program. That was the right thing to do. When the advice came to me and I saw that material, I reacted straightaway to that, as I have done to a
range of issues that have come through to me in the life of this program.

Additionally, Mr Speaker, I need to point out through you to the opposition that claims have been made to me that, by diligently observing the appropriate consultation processes and increasing the regulatory burden on a previously unregulated insulation market, I would in fact stop the effective discharge of insulation under this program. My response to that has always been the same: safety is a priority and appropriate levels of training are a priority. I stand by that. I stand by my statement that I gave in the House, and I stand by the decisions that I have made in relation to this program.

The Leader of the Opposition sought to censure the Prime Minister and raised comments about the discharge of my other responsibilities, and I just want to address the terms of that censure very briefly. I have discharged my responsibilities to the fullest capacity that I can muster and with a specific knowledge that, for 12 years, those opposite completely dropped the ball on a wide-ranging series of matters under the environment portfolio. In doing that, I have been specifically clear about what the requirements are for the environment minister: firstly, to believe in protecting the environment, to take regulatory decisions that provide certainty and set the bar high for environmental protection and to discharge a program of putting solar panels on the roofs of homes around Australia that is 11 times what you ever did and then providing a sustainable growth path for the solar industry, because everybody in this chamber is well aware—notwithstanding the shadow minister’s views about rebates for solar panels—that it is an industry that requires some certainty and continuity over the longer term.

There are many other matters in relation to the discharge of responsibilities that the environment minister has to make sure that he or she does properly. The most important one is to provide an effective discharge of the policies that the government brings forward: the largest energy-efficient program that the country has ever seen, over a million households insulated, significant economic stimulus, the provision of a national standard for training, and increasing the standards for safety so that, when we complete this program, not only will Australians have reduced greenhouse gas emissions and reduced energy costs but they will have a regulatory framework for the insulation industry that is more robust and more appropriate than was the case when we first came into government.

The SPEAKER—Order! The question is—

Honourable member interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The time has expired. He has accepted my wise direction. The time for the debate has expired.

Mr Katter interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Kennedy will resume his seat.

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

The House divided. [3.37 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.............. 58
Noes.............. 78
Majority........ 20

AYES

Abbott, A.J. Andrews, K.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baldwin, R.C.
Billson, B.F. Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I. Broadbent, R.
Chester, D. Ciobo, S.M.
Coulton, M. Dutton, P.C.
Farmer, P.F. Fletcher, P.
Forrest, J.A. * Gash, J.
Georgiou, P. Haase, B.W.
In division—

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (3.29 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Administrator of the United Nations Development Program, The Rt Hon. Helen Clark. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

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

AUSTRALIAN WINTER OLYMPICS TEAM

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (3.38 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence: I take this opportunity, on behalf of the government and the parliament, to wish the very best of luck to our Winter Olympics team going to the Vancouver Games. They start tomorrow. As we all know, in this country there is a huge supporter base for the Olympics, both the Summer Olympics and the Winter Olympics, and I am sure that over the next two weeks there are going to be a lot of bleary-eyed Australians glued to their television screens in the middle of the night. For those out there who have been debating whether or not the Australian team should be flying the Boxing Kangaroo, I am sure that I speak on behalf of all members when I say that they should fly the Boxing Kangaroo as high, as often and as proudly as the team

CHAMBER
wants. On behalf of all Australians and, I believe, all members of the House, we extend our best wishes to the Australian Winter Olympics team.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.39 pm)—On indulgence: I, too, on behalf of the opposition, would like to wish the team all the very best.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time

Mr PRICE (3.40 pm)—Mr Speaker, in question time the Deputy Prime Minister rose and sought to have a remark made by the member for Dickson withdrawn and it was withdrawn. I am not sure of the status of Twitter, but clearly if one reflects on a ruling of yours in this House or in a publication outside this House it is highly disorderly. On Twitter, the member for Dickson reflects on your ruling by suggesting that the remark he made was hardly ‘grossly unparliamentary’ as the Deputy Prime Minister claimed. Mr Speaker, I contend that, if members in this House are going to use Twitter, the same restrictions should apply to Twitter as they do to other publications and that this constitutes a reflection on your ruling about the withdrawal.

The SPEAKER—If members were to actually read *House of Representatives Practice*, they would know that these things are of moment. The member for O’Connor has been here long enough to remember that the only thing that was available to members who felt aggrieved by the rulings of Speakers was to go out on the doors and make comments. The electronic age has allowed for other methods of comment. At the time, because of the reaction of the Deputy Prime Minister to a remark that I did not hear, I accepted that it was appropriate that the member be asked to withdraw. The withdrawal was made immediately and without qualification. If there is to be this continuing critique of my performance on a fairly public social network, perhaps I had better update my skills to look at that social network, but I think at this stage I will accept what happened in the chamber as being the conclusion. However, I think this illustrates that these very powerful social networks do allow us all to perhaps read people’s minds and listen to their inner thoughts.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney (3.42 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr HOCKEY—I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr HOCKEY—During question time, the Minister for Finance and Deregulation claimed that my colleagues and I were lying about his statement that ‘dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s did not matter’. I refer the House to the interview between David Speers and Lindsay Tanner yesterday on Sky News PM Agenda. David Speers said: In the rush to stimulate jobs at the time of the global financial crisis when it hit, in hindsight would not some pause have been worthwhile to look at what some of these problems could result in?

Lindsay Tanner:

Obviously, those things have been taken into account. The minister—meaning the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts—and his department have been on the ball on the implementation challenges, but we have had some difficulties in this program. But I don’t think it’s right—

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, a point of order: the member for North Sydney knows full well that he has to go directly to where
he has been misrepresented. He has been talking for two minutes.

The SPEAKER—The member will conclude his personal explanation.

Mr HOCKEY—There is only one more sentence and then I am finished. I repeat that Lindsay Tanner said:

Obviously those things have been taken into account. The minister and his department have been on the ball on the implementation challenges, but we have had some difficulties in this program. But I don’t think it’s right to say that we should have sat back and said, ‘Well, hang on a second, let’s focus on some of the dotting of the i’s and crossing of the t’s,’ because we’re in a crisis situation.

Mr TANNER (Melbourne—Minister for Finance and Deregulation) (3.44 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr TANNER—I do. And it has just been repeated in the most recent statement.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr TANNER—In question time today, the Leader of the Opposition stated that I had said yesterday that the government could not be expected to dot its i’s and cross its t’s with respect to the administration of the insulation program. As those who are listening might have noted in what was just read out by the member for North Sydney, I was asked a specific question about delaying decisions with regard to the government stimulus matters, and the question related to: why didn’t the government deal with issues such as the risk association with metal fasteners at the time it made these decisions? My answer was: these are matters for implementation, rightly to be dealt with by the minister and the department, and this was not a reason for delaying those decisions. So the interpretation that is being placed on my statement by the member for North Sydney and the Leader of the Opposition is totally false.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 22 of 2009-10

The SPEAKER (3.46 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 22 of 2009-10 entitled Geoscience Australia.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.46 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

HANSARD: INCORPORATION OF SPEECHES

The SPEAKER (3.46 pm)—I have a statement to make about incorporation of speeches. As I understand it, this matter was raised with the Deputy Speaker by the member for Hughes earlier this day. The long-standing practice of the House has been that H...
change as possible in proceedings and of ensuring that Hansard remain a record of what was actually said in the chamber. Additionally, I am concerned that those members who speak from notes, or without notes, would be totally disadvantaged.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Older Australians

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

The Government’s failure to recognise the achievements of older Australians.

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

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

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (3.48 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker. My letter to you contains a sober reflection on something which is really a most serious problem—that is, the way the government is treating the achievements of senior Australians. It is the sneer in the voice. It is the pejorative language. It is the implication that all the problems that this government might face now in making projections—whether it be to raise taxes as in the ETS, a grand tax on everything, or other taxes—are the fault of senior Australians who are daring to live longer and healthier lives. That, indeed, is a cause for great joy; not a cause for insulting and demeaning those senior Australians who have built this country, raised families and given us the great prosperity that we enjoy.

With the production of the last Intergenerational report, we had from Mr Swan dire predictions about what a problem we were going to have to face and that senior Australians were definitely a problem that had to be dealt with. Whereas in fact there is nothing new in the statements that the Intergenerational report has made. The earliest publication on the fact that we are an ageing population were made as far back as 2001, when the first serious research was done by Access Economics, showing, quite frankly, that the way we have organised ourselves in Australia—with an age pension being paid out of consolidated revenue, not out of funds, like in other countries, which were going to go broke because they had not figured on people living so long—has made it quite sustainable and made us able to deal with it. One of the areas where we do have a serious funding problem is in our healthcare system. But the healthcare system is not a problem of the ageing of the population. It plays a very small part in the overall escalation of healthcare costs. To try and blame it on senior Australians and to try and make people feel bad that they are using the healthcare system that we have built up is in fact reprehensible.

Statistically speaking, we all use the healthcare system the most in the last two years of our life. I have never been prepared to say which will be the last two years of my life and I have never asked anybody else to do that either, because it is simply silly to do so. But what is real is that, if we use our healthcare system properly, use our pharmaceutical benefits system properly, use our private health insurance properly and take care of our public hospital systems properly, we will see something that we should all strive towards: the compression of morbidity. That is when the time that people are unwell or infirm or have some form of incapacity is compressed into a smaller and smaller time of life closer to the time of death.

Relevant to this whole question is the way in which the government is presently attacking the private health insurance system. Currently we have over nine million people who
have private health insurance. It is a very sensible policy because it opens up an alternative to the overburdened public hospital system. We have an efficient private hospital system and it is the private health insurance organisations which finance it and enable it to be in place at all.

There was a time previously when, I guess, the infamous Senator Richardson spent most of his time trying to drive private health insurance down below 22 per cent, which would in fact have meant that the whole system would have collapsed. Fortunately, we on this side, even in opposition in those days, always maintained a strong and purposeful campaign to maintain a good private health insurance system. Finally, we prevailed. Since we brought in our reforms when we were in office we have seen a very high incidence of private health insurance. It has been a carrot and a stick. There is a surcharge if you are earning above, I think, $75,000 a year and if you do not have private health insurance you have to pay an additional one per cent levy. That is fair.

But we also said we would give a rebate if you took out private health insurance. We set it at 30 per cent initially because 30 per cent is about the rate of income tax that 80 per cent of the population pay. It is a good benchmark. We then said, ‘Medicare is available to everybody; therefore, the private health insurance rebate should be available to everybody who takes it out.’ The stipulation was that you could only have the rebate for private health insurance if you were eligible for Medicare. The two are inextricably linked, and it is fair and reasonable that we continue to see and support a private health insurance system.

If you look at older Australians, you will see that they value that private health insurance almost more than anything else. Indeed, the older our senior Australians become the more precious it is to them. They know that, due to the way Labor governments right across Australia have let our public hospital systems run down, their opportunity to have anything other than life-threatening incidents dealt with immediately in the public health system is very limited. They feel that they need that backup to know that they can have their doctor of choice and entry into a private health facility with that private health insurance.

This government has set out to penalise people. It has set out to take away that 30 per cent rebate for thousands upon thousands of Australians. Yet in the lead-up to the election, when Mr Rudd and the now Minister for Health and Ageing sat on this side of the House, they would stand up day after day and say they would not touch the private health insurance rebate—‘No, hand on heart, we won’t touch it. You can rely on it remaining with us.’

Mr Truss—They wrote a letter.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Indeed, they did write a letter. They gave every assurance to the Australian people that they would be a safe pair of hands if they were elected. How they have let the Australian people down. There is a litany of broken promises that we now see, where the government promised that it would not tamper with things that affect senior Australians in particular and yet it has. Look at superannuation: it ripped out of the system the benefits that we as a government put into it to allow people certainty.

Two of the favourite words that the government like to use are certainty and complexity. They have certainty when they say, ‘If we get our policy in it will be certain for this group or that group.’ But when they cannot answer the questions as to why it is unfair or why it will not work or why people cannot comprehend it, it is complexity.
Those are their two favourite words. They are code words for saying, ‘We’re breaking a promise and we really don’t know how it’s going to work.’

There is the ETS that the government wants to impose and which it has just voted in favour of in this chamber. Let me point out that in this chamber the opposition has voted against that legislation every time it has been put into this chamber. It was also totally rejected in the Senate, as it will be again. Yet it wants to impose this huge tax on everything which will impact on people’s lives, particularly senior Australians. They will see the cascading effect of that tax which is placed on the very fundamentals we regard as essential to a civilised society—the ability to turn on the lights and the ability to have our cities lit so that we are not endangered by being knocked over or beaten up by somebody trying to pinch your handbag or whatever. That is a very real question, particularly for older Australian women who feel that they are intimidated and unable to get around unless there is light enabling them to feel safe. This tax would be put on this very fundamental energy source and cascade down through the price of everything: the price of petrol for their cars, the price of their cars, the price of their food, the price of their rent, the price of their house—everything. At the same time the government has ripped benefits out of the superannuation system, again putting doubts in people’s minds as to whether superannuation is a good investment for people to make.

Because we were solid about that in government we have seen people’s superannuation savings grow from around $450 billion to over a trillion dollars. This is because people did feel safe. When we said, ‘If you are over 60 and your superannuation stream of income comes from a source which is taxed, you will not have to pay tax on that,’ it was welcomed enormously by people who saw this as a chance to be able to live well in their older age and have a good life. Yet I meet people in the streets now who simply say, ‘I am scared stiff about my super,’ because they feel that it is under attack and because so many things that this government promised it would not touch it is touching.

When can we see the Henry report? Why won’t they release it so that we can all have a look? This is the same Mr Henry about whom, if you were in the Senate chamber any day this week and went through the budget forecasts, you would find that the figures are so rubbery that they cannot be justified. Since I have been in this place I do not think that I have ever seen one set of budget figures out of the Treasury that were accurate. Jokingly, we used to call them ‘jesstimates’, not estimates. And this is the man who has been charged with the responsibility of looking at all of our taxation system? No, he was not allowed to look at the GST and he was not allowed to look at the ETS cascading tax.

So we are in this situation where we are far from saying to senior Australians, ‘You are making and continue to make a fantastic contribution to this country.’ Whether it is by remaining in the workforce, whether it is by paying tax through the GST, whether it is by paying tax on income that is not tax-free or whether it is by being volunteers and providing essential services without which our society could not exist, the worth and value of Australia’s seniors are huge. It is now up to this government to stop the demeaning, sneering attitude towards people who are senior Australians—and I put it to you: if you are over 50, you’re in.

Indeed, the new magazine launched today by Australian Seniors has none other than the Prime Minister and his wife on the front cover. I think that indicates that they want to identify with seniors. So why on the one
hand do they want that identification and on the other hand sneer at the contribution of older Australians? I can tell you, people do not like it. If you read the front-page story in the Financial Review today, you will find that talkback radio, which comprises a very large audience of senior Australians, has seen through the dishonesty of the Prime Minister: his inability to tell the truth, his inability to honour his promises and his total inability to answer a straight question with a straight answer. Again and again it is coming through. It is a quite a revelation to read those comments from the leading talkback hosts around Australia.

So in saying that I condemn the government for not realising the worth of senior Australians, what I am really saying is that they deserve to be condemned—condemned for the demeaning attitude and the demonising attitude they have to senior Australians in saying that they are to be blamed for having a government that is not prepared to deal with its health system, not prepared to honour its superannuation system and prepared to go on a big spending binge—as they still are—with regard to the $21 billion of unspent stimulus, which is estimated to go on way past the next election and which is money that the Australian people are going to have to pay back.

Instead of attacking that cohort of Australians, laud them not only for the contribution they have made and the wisdom that they bring to bear but to thank them for being continuing contributing members of our society. They are vital. In the original research that I published back in 2001, chapter 2 was called ‘We’re all in it together’—and we are. We are one people; we are all of one company, and for a government to disparage and demean older Australians because they have reached a particular age, I think, is downright unAustralian. (Time expired)

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (4.04 pm)—I am certainly keen to contribute and to talk about how much this government values our older Australians and values the contributions that they have made to society. We recognise their many achievements as well. I will also point out many of the very definitive actions that the Rudd government has taken to assist our older Australians. We are certainly committed to building a health and aged-care system for Australia’s future. We have instigated pension reform. We have certainly taken some very decisive action to assist our older Australians. We look to the opposition, and they just look at having spending cuts and blaming someone else. They would be risking Australia’s future, risking the commitments that we have made to our older Australians.

Whilst we look at all the challenges that we have in our future and we discuss the challenges of our ageing population, we also recognise the wonderful opportunities that it brings us as a nation: the wonderful opportunities to relish the wisdom and experience of our older Australians and the remarkable contribution that they have made to our nation. And when we look at some of the actions that we have taken to assist our older Australians, there have been many that have been made in the two years since the Rudd government was elected. After 12 years of neglect when it came to so many areas that impacted on our older Australians—issues such as pension reform, health care and aged care—it has been the Rudd government that has taken very decisive action in those last two years in terms of providing vital services for our older Australians.

First and foremost is that of pension. Our pension reform was the most significant reform since the pension was introduced a hundred years ago. Indeed, this was a major issue amongst many older Australians right across our nation. The Rudd government
understood many of the cost-of-living pressures that our older Australians had, and we did increase the pension. The total increase for single pensioners on the maximum rate was just over $70 a fortnight and for couples combined it was just over $29 a fortnight. We did that in recognition of the increasing cost of living that our pensioners faced. As I said, this was the first major pension reform in over a hundred years. If we look to the opposition, the fact is that they were in for 12 years and failed to have any major pension reform at all. In fact, just the other day I was having a read of the Leader of the Opposition’s book *Battlelines*. In it he says that people should not actually be eligible for the age pension until they are 70 years of age. I am sure it would be of major concern to many older Australians to hear that. He certainly is a risk to the future of all Australians, particularly our older Australians.

We also look to the major reforms that we have had, particularly when it comes to aged care. I would certainly like to point out many of the major achievements of the Rudd government in that area. We have more services for our older Australians. We also have more funding for those aged-care services. We are committed to more quality and accountability and we have improved those measures and also increased our investment in the aged-care workforce. Those extra services that are being provided are vitally important. Since the Rudd government was elected there are 10,000 more aged-care places across the country.

Our transitional care program has made a major difference in the lives of so many older Australians. Of those 2,000 transitional care places, 662 are now in place and operational. This makes a very big difference in terms of older people being able to leave hospital sooner. They are treated in a much more appropriate setting and it certainly has been great to see the success of that in making a difference in people’s lives. When it comes to providing future aged-care services, we have just had the latest aged-care approvals round, with more than 12,000 places in that round for 8,000 residential care places and 4,000 community care places. We understand that older people want to remain with their family, friends and communities and that is why we have those large numbers of places plus a $200 million capital assistance package as well.

When it comes to aged care we have provided much across the board to protect our older Australians and to provide services for them. We have improved the quality and accountability of our nursing homes. We have strengthened our police check requirements, we have improved the reporting requirements for missing residents and we have a website where people can check on the compliance history of a particular nursing home because we are committed to building an aged-care system for Australia’s future and we understand how important that is.

The shadow minister for seniors also mentioned health, which is somewhat remarkable considering the opposition leader as the minister for health in the Howard government ripped a billion dollars out of our health and hospital system. He froze the GP training places and he ignored the nursing shortage that we had in our health and hospital system. When we look at the achievements of the Rudd government in two years, we have made an investment to commit $64 billion to our health and hospital system over the next five years, put $600 million in our elective surgery program and invested $750 million in taking the pressure off our emergency departments. We have invested $1.1 billion in training initiatives. We understand how important it is to have a health and hospital system in place to provide services for Australians today and tomorrow. That is why we also have the National Health and Hospital
Reform Commission process underway at the moment with more than 100 consultations into the future of our health and hospital system undertaken so far.

I want to touch on what the shadow minister for seniors was saying in relation to private health insurance. We recently saw the release of the *Operations of the private health insurer's annual report*. Those who made dire predictions of a drop in the number of people in private health insurance funds were proved wrong yet again. The latest figures released just recently by the Private Health Insurance Administration Council showed the numbers of Australians taking out private health insurance continues to grow.

When we talk about the action we have taken to assist our older Australians and we outline increases in funding and services that we are providing and initiatives for training, one of the other major areas that we focus on is that of promoting healthy active ageing—providing support to our older Australians. We certainly know that our older Australians continue to contribute so much. No matter where I go, people will say that they are busier in retirement than when they were working because they are getting out there. Some people continue to work, some people volunteer, there are many people with major family commitments as well and the government supports them in many ways. One of our election commitments was to establish an Ambassador for Ageing. For the first time in Australia we have a person who is the Ambassador for Ageing. For the first time in Australia we have a person who is the Ambassador for Ageing to promote healthy ageing. We appointed Noeline Brown, who is an Australian icon. Noeline has done an outstanding job travelling the country talking to seniors’ groups about the contributions that they continue to make and she is truly remarkable. She is just over 70 and she does a remarkable job in assisting our older Australians and encouraging them. This was one of our major election commitments and it is also an acknowledgement of the role that our older Australians play. Noeline does an outstanding job.

The *Intergenerational report* the government released just last week was a very important report and it showed how critical it is to plan for the future and invest in productivity and participation whilst maintaining spending discipline. The report outlined many of the changes that we are going to see in the demographics of our nation and the increase in costs as well. In practical terms the ageing of the population means that between now and 2050 the number of people aged 65 to 84 will more than double and the number of people aged 85 and over will more than quadruple. That means the number of working people for every person aged 65 and over will fall from its current level of five to around 2.7.

This was a very important report in terms of the future and our future planning, which is of extreme importance. What we hear from the Liberal Party is that they are too backward thinking to come up with ideas for the future or to understand the reality for future generations and how we should be planning now. We certainly have a genuine plan for the future. They do not have any plans. They are a risk to the future because they are not looking at all the challenges that we face ahead.

As part of releasing the *Intergenerational report* we also launched a new $43.3 million Productive Ageing package. It provides vital training and support for older Australians who want to stay in the workforce, because we understand that there are many older Australians who would like to continue to work. That package includes 2,000 training packages for employers to allow eligible mature age workers to retrain as supervisors or trainers and also $500,000 in grants for
Golden Gurus organisations. Golden Gurus is a wonderful initiative so that our younger Australians can learn from the wisdom and experience of our older Australians. That package also includes face-to-face job support and training for 2,000 eligible mature-age workers. We certainly have a lot of initiatives to help our older Australians who do want to continue to work.

I add that I am very lucky as the Minister for Ageing to meet with so many of the wonderful national groups that we have that do an outstanding job in providing services for our older Australians. Indeed, the shadow minister for seniors mentioned the launch of the revamped magazine *50 Something*. This is a magazine that the National Seniors organisation put out. We were all pleased to be at the launch this morning. It was great to be there and to launch this revamp of this wonderful magazine with our Prime Minister on the front. It has a wonderful array of stories of interest to everyone. I will just read from the column provided by Michael O’Neill, who is the CEO of National Seniors Australia. He talks about the challenges we face in the future and the challenges that, as a nation, we have to work towards providing for. He says at the end of that column that we have to ‘seize the moment but allow the wisdom of decades past to guide the journey’. I think that really encapsulates all of the sentiments that National Seniors speak about and what this government believes.

We honour and respect our older Australians, and we do that through many avenues and also through the direct action we have in providing assistance for them. That is what is vitally important and what they require. We honour the fact that these are the people who built our nation. These are the people who worked hard, raised their families, paid their taxes, contributed so much and continue to contribute to that, and we certainly honour that and ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect, especially through government initiatives that make a real difference to their lives. Under the previous government we had 12 years of neglect when it came to planning and providing that support, and in the two years that the Rudd government has been in we have brought in pension reform and more services in our health and aged-care sector, because we understand that this is what is very important to older Australians.

What is very unfortunate is that the shadow minister for seniors, when you look at her record in government, just blamed everybody else for every problem and did not take responsibility for it at all. If we would like to talk about the Liberal Party and their approach to older Australians, I would like to remind the House of when the member for Sturt was the Minister for Ageing. I have come across an article from the *Sunday Age* from 6 May 2007, ‘I’m too young for this job, says aged-care minister’. The article goes on to say that he was:

Describing caring for the aged as an “unenviable industry” …

I think he really highlighted the Liberal Party’s perception of older Australians and the aged-care sector when he made those remarks. He said, ‘I’m too young and have a young family.’ He thought he was too young to be the aged-care minister. I think that is absolutely an insult to older Australians. I consider it an absolute honour and privilege to be the Minister for Ageing and to meet firsthand our remarkable older Australians, who contribute so much to this nation. This government values all of those contributions that they have made, and we respect them and treat them with absolute dignity. Most importantly, we continue to provide all the reforms that are necessary for those people in providing support for their lives.
After 12 years of neglect, we have acted swiftly and decisively to provide for our older Australians, because we understand how important that is. We also understand—the Liberal Party does not understand—how we have to be planning for the future and our future ageing populations as well. We are tackling all of the challenges in front of us as a nation. What we have instead with the coalition is just a risk. They do not understand the issues and the challenges. It is the Rudd government that understands those challenges and, of course, one of those major challenges is the ageing of our population. We have certainly looked to the future and those challenges, and in doing so we totally respect our older Australians and the remarkable contributions they have made.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (4.18 pm)—Dilemma or deception? That is the question that needs to be asked about the government’s spin on the recently released Intergenerational report. The dilemma is how to plan for a future with a growing disproportion of older people and still balance the budget. The deception is government propaganda that would have us believe that older Australians are a burden. Older Australians are at risk of becoming a scapegoat. To paraphrase the Old Testament’s Leviticus, older Australians are the government’s symbolic goat sent by the high priest into the wilderness with the sins of the people laid on its back.

The challenges cannot be realistically addressed if the government is preoccupied with looking for easy targets. The government will make older Australians the scapegoat and peddle this propaganda to frighten us into believing that there is a need to reduce services, increase taxes, massively increase the population by migration and force older Australians to work till they drop. The challenges highlighted in this Intergenerational report are not new and should not come as a surprise. The purpose behind this report should be to enable the government to plan effectively for the future, not to enable the government to intimidate older citizens.

Basically the report argues that government spending will outgrow revenue by 2050. In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald of 8 February titled ‘Intergenerational tale distorts ageing problem’, leading economic writer Ross Gittins says the budgetary cost of an ageing population is ‘exaggerated’. He unmasks the deception when he posits that the government makes its case by:

… lumping in with the rising cost of the age pension, aged care and healthcare spending directly related to ageing, the projected growth in healthcare spending arising from a larger population and the populace’s predicted ever-greater demand for more and better healthcare.

The kindest complexion you could put on that is that it is very disingenuous of the government, but I will leave others to make that judgment. The article goes on to point out that the actual budgetary cost of ageing is both ‘modest’ and ‘manageable’. The real problem is how we fund ‘the expected strong growth in the quantity and quality of health care’ for everyone. That is a problem which is not just to do with ageing. Rather than blame the blow-out in costs on seniors and target cuts to health services to seniors, the government needs to resolve to fix the entire health system, a core election promise it has not yet fulfilled.

As remarked by Mr Gittins, if the government wants to cap taxation at 23.5 per cent of GDP and gloss over the role that increasing taxes or holding off on tax cuts could have in addressing the fiscal gap, there is no other way than to make older Australians pay. We have already seen this in the government’s asinine cost-saving attempt to reduce the Medicare rebate for cataract surgery.
The government should balance the budget by eliminating their own wasteful spending rather than robbing older Australians of dignity in retirement—for which they have already paid. Using the intergenerational issue to argue for a massive increase in population is a fallacy. It is not axiomatic that a massively increased population will result in a higher standard of living or higher productivity—indeed, it is likely to bring greater budgetary pressures to bear. To date, the government has demonstratively failed to deliver on its promise to improve hospital services, telecommunications, roads, water and the environment. Before we add roughly another 15 million people to our population the government must deliver a comprehensible and believable policy on infrastructure development and carry through with it.

If we are serious about increasing productivity, much more could be done to manage the more fantastical claims of the unions for wage hikes that bear no correlation to increased productivity and have only resulted in increased strike action. Failure to manage wage increases and strike action is the real threat to productivity, not older Australians. If, though, the government genuinely wants to give older Australians the option of contributing to increased productivity by retiring later, then rather than token measures, the government needs to provide attractive tax and superannuation measures to retirees to work beyond retirement age.

Last year the government introduced legislation and breached yet another of their election promises, cutting the superannuation co-contribution scheme. Any contributions to superannuation over $50,000 are now punitively taxed. As Piers Akerman noted in the Daily Telegraph yesterday:

… nearly two million Australians will wake to find that they have been caught out by this broken promise and hundreds of thousands of others will discover that their retirement and superannuation plans have been destroyed …

This is not the work of a government trying to encourage self-reliance in retirement; this is false economy. Much more needs to be done to encourage superannuation savings now if the budget is going to balance in 2050.

Much more needs to be done about age discrimination in the workplace. Although there are legislative instruments to prevent ageism, there needs to be a deeper attitudinal shift. It is unfortunate that the government’s recent rhetoric does little to promote this. Their discourse has been one in which older Australians are viewed as a burden on the economy. We need to protect and promote flexible employment, not reintroduce a rigid system which curtails it. For many older people, the choice between continuing to work full time or retiring is not one they always want to make, nor should they have to. Many would like to continue in the paid workforce, albeit on a less demanding basis. If flexible workplaces were enabled, the wealth of knowledge, experience and the wisdom of older workers could continue to be utilised to increase productivity.

There are more than financial benefits that will come from removing the barriers to a more flexible workplace for seniors. Studies show that encouraging older people to remain in the workforce has both physical and mental health benefits. Working beyond retirement is not for everyone, but it is too simplistic to assume that when a person retires they will no longer contribute to the productivity of the nation. Although this contribution may not be directly quantifiable in terms of our GDP, the volunteering and caring role that many older Australians undertake on retiring is vital to Australia’s productivity. This contribution needs to be better understood and recognised. In the interests of a balanced argument the government must
initiate a new Productivity Commission report into the value that is added by older Australians. Many retirees will spend their time caring for grandchildren or partners, a caring role that would otherwise tie up already stretched resources.

In our deliberations on the challenges of a changing demographic, let us reflect on the disingenuousness of the government in portraying seniors as a drag on the economy and set the record right. Older Australians are our nation builders and defenders. They have contributed tax for several decades and their ongoing voluntary contributions to the nation can never be measured solely in economic terms. On this side of the House we will continue to defend, with great muscularity, their right to respect, their right to dignity and their right to be valued beyond mere economic units.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (4.28 pm)—In the minute and a half that I think I now have, I first of all want to take this opportunity to completely dispel any thinking that people listening to this debate may have that the recognition and care—particularly recognition—by the government or by the community at large of our older Australians is merely the thought of those opposite. I take offence at that, and I want to put that completely straight immediately. It is not a political plaything to say, ‘We care about older Australians more than you do.’ I think we all do. And I think the actions of the government—in the past, currently and into the future—reflect that.

When we talk about health issues, this government has, for the first time in many years of government in this country I think, actually talked about preventative health programs—something that will really assist our older people with living active, participatory lives into their future. Secondly, it is completely correct to say that older Australians, should they wish to work longer, should be allowed to and encouraged to. At the same time, should they not be in a position to have to or should they not wish to, their work in our community, contributing in other ways, is equally valuable, equally measured and equally recognised. What some of our younger members of the community might care to do is step up to the voluntary roles that a lot of those older people are doing and to assist them in carrying that work out.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

That the House do now adjourn.

**Royal Flying Doctor Service**

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (4.30 pm)—I rise this evening to pay tribute, as I have on a number of occasions in the past in this House, to the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and to extend my gratitude to the service for the vital work it does for the people of the outback in Queensland and, indeed, across Australia. I pay tribute also to those pilots and nurses who I have witnessed over and over again being prepared to leave their base in darkness and at dawn, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to attend a clinic or an emergency wherever the call comes from.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service is the realisation of a dream by Presbyterian minister, Reverend John Flynn, who witnessed how the tyranny of distance was making it difficult for remote Queenslanders to visit a doctor. In fact, there were just two doctors treating people across an area of almost two million square kilometres. Reverend Flynn wanted these people of the outback to be secure in the knowledge that there was someone to provide them with health care,
no matter where they lived. In May this year, it will be 82 years since the Australian Inland Aerial Medical Service was born in Cloncurry, Queensland, and Reverend Flynn’s vision of a mantle of safety for the people of the outback was realised.

Now known as the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the not-for-profit organisation has only grown bigger and better. From its first base in Cloncurry—now relocated to Mount Isa—the flying doctor has grown to 21 bases and another five health facilities across Australia. The first flying doctor pilot, Arthur Affleck, flew with a compass and perhaps some inadequate maps. He had no navigational aids—no GPS—aside from the compass, and no radio. Today, the Royal Flying Doctor Service has 53 aircraft and is Australia’s fourth largest fleet, employing just under 1,000 people. Last financial year, the RFDS attended more than 274,000 patients and flew almost 24 million square kilometres of area of this great landmass, Australia.

Last financial year, the 14 aircraft of the Royal Flying Doctor Service’s Queensland section flew more than 6.7 million kilometres and clocked up over 20,000 flying hours. They treated more than 44,800 patients in over 5,100 clinics conducted across the state. In my own electorate of Maranoa, the Longreach office conducted 488 clinics, and the Charleville aerial base conducted 415. Together, the two bases attended almost 5,000 patients in western Queensland, located in remote communities many kilometres from medical help.

These are incredible statistics. It just gives a glimpse of how vital the RFDS is to the health, safety and survival of the people of the outback. But, of course, none of this can be possible without the financial support of companies, individuals, the federal government and communities.

On the bar in the Birdsville Hotel there is a sign hanging over a collection tin. It informs patrons that they are not in America and they should not be wearing their baseball caps backwards, because if they do they will be fined a gold coin. It is a humorous sign, and no doubt it has collected a fair bit of gold from the amused tourists. It is a cheeky message as well, but it also shows how deeply the people of Birdsville and the outback of Australia feel for, support and appreciate the work of the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Last year I had the privilege of winning the Politzer Prize, which is an annual photographic competition for federal MPs and senators. The PR group Parker and Partners organise this competition and, with the help of journalists and photographers from the press gallery, they choose their winner. The photograph gave just a glimpse of the thousands of pelicans on the floodplains of the Georgina River in the west of my electorate.

The money that I received as a prize for that photograph will go to the Royal Flying Doctor Service tomorrow morning in Brisbane. It will go to Nino Di Marco. A representative from Parker and Partners will also be there. Through this process I want to convey my appreciation to the company for providing this generous donation. I certainly look forward to handing over this $5,000 cheque.

The motto of the Royal Flying Doctor Service is: ‘The furthest corner, the finest care’. Nothing could be truer, and, in this 82nd year of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, I salute all those past and present who have served in the Royal Flying Doctor Service. (Time expired)

Badgerys Creek

Member for Robertson

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (4.35 pm)—The national aviation white paper released at the
end of last year spells the death knell for Badgerys Creek airport. It is no longer an option.

After 11 years of Howard government procrastination, there is finally action on this important issue. The Commonwealth and the state of New South Wales will develop a joint proposal for the future use of the Badgerys Creek site. I must put on the record, and remind the task force, that many local residents continue to remain affected by the airport designation, both in and around Badgerys Creek.

I have received many letters, emails and calls from affected residents. They have been living with the airport plan and its designation for more than two decades. Those that fall within the airport designation zone are the ones bearing the greatest burden. Many are unable to develop their properties. Those that can are burdened by conditions imposed due to the Australian noise exposure forecasts.

One local mother wrote to me last year about her circumstances. She is living with her husband and two children in a caravan while they are trying to build their dream home. The local council has advised that they must design their home according to acoustic reports which compel them to comply with the requirements of the airport designation and ANEF. Their builder has advised this will add an additional $30,000 to the cost of their house, money they cannot afford, due to an airport that is not going to be built. Their only option is to wait.

Another local resident wrote:
My parents currently live by themselves. My mother has Alzheimer’s disease in an advanced stage. My father is a single carer at an age of 71. The plan was to build a house for my parents on my 25 acre property so I can assist looking after my mother as my current house is only an old keeper’s cottage. I have been advised by the local council that I will not be able to develop at all on my land. I would not even be able to rebuild my current house in case of a fire.

These are real people and real stories. Their needs are real and their urgency is real. The decision not to build Badgerys Creek airport has been made but the message to these people is: hurry up and wait. They look to us, their elected representatives, for assistance and we must assist them. The task force must assist by making the lifting of the airport designation an absolute priority in their deliberations so that those affected may finally get on with their lives.

I also want to comment on today’s article in the Daily Telegraph on page 3 headed, ‘Radio ads breach may cost Neal seat.’ I know for a fact that Ms Neal has worked tirelessly for a radiotherapy unit on the Central Coast and I was fully aware about the radio ads last year. Ms Neal’s involvement in this issue predates the preselection in Robertson. The Petitions Committee, of which I am chair, received a petition of more than 17,900 signatures in support of such a unit. The petition was tabled in the federal parliament by Ms Neal on 10 February 2009. The Petitions Committee conducted public hearings on the Central Coast on 23 March 2009 at the Entrance Campus of Tuggerah College, and Ms Kathleen Smith from Cancer Voices testified before the committee at those hearings about the need for a radiotherapy unit on the Central Coast. Ms Neal’s involvement is well known and well documented.

Earlier today in the parliament, Ms Neal highlighted the inaccuracies she has identified in the Telegraph article. Ms Neal rightly continues to carry out her duties as the member for Robertson, and any attempt to silence her impinges on her privilege as a member of the federal parliament. As such, the politically motivated charges against her to the ALP are absurd and the sourcing of this information to the Daily Telegraph smacks of
political opportunism. And tellingly those ALP members who have sourced this information to the Daily Telegraph are themselves in breach of ALP party rules.

**Hume Electorate: Superannuation**

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (4.40 pm)—In late December 2009 the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority announced that they had suspended Trio Capital Ltd as a trustee of four superannuation funds, including the Astarra superannuation group. This collapse had implications on the superannuation nest eggs, worth some $300 million nationwide, of approximately 10,000 members. It directly affects the superannuation contributions of both the directors and employees of Vale SMS Pty Ltd in Moss Vale in the electorate of Hume. Vale employs over 200 local residents, some of whom are very close to retirement. It also affects many retired constituents in the Hume electorate—and, I would suspect, in nearly every other electorate in the country—who rely on allocated pension payments from Astarra for their daily survival.

The management of Vale are being given the run-around and cannot get any information from either ASIC, APRA or the appointed trustee in relation to the fate of their compulsory superannuation contributions, totalling over $3.5 million. In March 2008 the then Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law, Senator Nick Sherry, said: Superannuation sits at the core of this Government’s approach to retirement income. A well functioning super system is a must for the income security of all Australians.

What does this collapse say about this statement?

These superannuation contributions were paid into this fund under the compulsory employer superannuation scheme by Vale for the future retirement of their employees and, for that matter, the directors of the company themselves. The government needs to inform or at least direct both ASIC and APRA to address the fears of the 200 employees of Vale SMS, their families and the other 9,800 members of Astarra Superannuation, many of whom depend on the regular payments from this fund for their very survival, and give some kind of assurance that their retirement nest eggs will be safe.

I raised the issue in writing with the Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law today in the chamber, and the minister and I have had a brief discussion on it. The minister was not aware of this particular issue and I have full confidence in his acting very professionally to ensure that some action is taken with regard to protecting the retirement nest eggs of all of the employees of Vale SMS Pty Ltd in Moss Vale, its directors and indeed all of the 10,000 people right across the country who must be living with deep trepidation about whether the money they have put away for their retirement is going to be returned to them in the way of the superannuation that they have diligently paid and had diligently managed for them by the companies they work for. I thank the House for its indulgence.

**Climate Change**

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (4.43 pm)—I rise to draw attention to the dishonesty of the approach to taking action on climate change that has been brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition. The first element of the dishonesty of the Leader of the Opposition’s approach is that he wants to send a message to all of those people that are sceptical about the science of climate change that he is a friend, that he is their champion. Yet, on the other hand, he wants to send a parallel message to those people, the majority of Australians, who want action on climate change
that he actually does believe that we need to take action. This is the balancing act, the parallel game that is going on, from the opposition leader. It is a game that we will pursue and we will expose—because you cannot walk on both sides of the street.

The Leader of the Opposition has come forward with a policy that accepts a five per cent reduction in emissions. Let us approach the debate on that basis. Let us assume that every person in this place is now signed up to a minimum five per cent reduction in emissions. If we are all agreed, that does not leave the Lord Monckton supporters anyone to support in this place—because no-one here is opposed to science and no-one here is opposed to reducing emissions by a minimum of five per cent.

So let us have a look at the plans that have been brought forward. The plan brought forward by the Rudd Labor government has been enhanced as a result of the cooperation that occurred before the consensus that was achieved between the two parties broke down and Tony Abbott came to the leadership. It is a plan that first and foremost puts a cap on emissions. It says: ‘We’ll cap emissions—that is the only way we will actually stop emissions from increasing—and, over time, reduce them.’ The second point is that it is a scheme that says we will make the big polluters pay, that the biggest 1,000 polluters, those who are responsible for the largest proportion of emissions of carbon into the atmosphere, will bear the cost. Obviously those businesses will seek to recover some of the increased costs by passing on some of those costs to the businesses they do business with and to the consumers who ultimately purchase their product. We have acknowledged that, and we have set up a system that ensures we are providing assistance to the individuals, households and businesses that will be affected so that they can cope with those increased costs and help themselves to become more energy efficient and make the transition into a low-carbon future. Every cent of revenue that will be collected under the CPRS will be returned to individuals and businesses in the form of increased assistance.

On the other hand we have the opposition proposal, which does not have a cap. The significance of that is that the modelling released by the Department of Climate Change indicates that, under their proposal, the absence of a cap means that, by 2020, emissions will increase by 13 per cent—not only will they not decrease by the five per cent that everybody allegedly agrees to; they will increase. On the first test of any policy measure, this fails. The first test is: will it achieve what it is designed to achieve? The answer to that is no—because it will not reduce emissions.

The second element of deception within this particular proposal is that the Leader of the Opposition says there will be no cost. You cannot take on the great challenge of climate change and transitioning Australia and our economy into a low-carbon future without there being costs. It is dishonest not to acknowledge that. Under the Leader of the Opposition’s system, in the first instance the costs will be borne by all taxpayers. That will either be through increased taxes or through reducing and stripping away the services that we rely on. Under the opposition’s model, we would end up having a panel which would decide which technology should receive the benefit of government assistance. We have seen what they have done in the past. Let us not talk about the member for Wentworth and his involvement with the rainmaker, which cost $10 million and did not produce one drop of rain. Such are the phoney approaches that have been brought forward by those on the other side.
The bottom line in this debate is that the only way we can transform our economy into the low-carbon economy that will be needed in the future is to put a price on carbon. Those on the other side know it. That is why they agreed to it. They are walking away for cheap politically opportunistic reasons, but they will be condemned for their failure to stand up and fight on this important issue for the nation. *(Time expired)*

Veterans’ Affairs

*Mrs Markus* (Greenway) (4.48 pm)—I rise in my capacity as shadow minister for veterans’ affairs to speak on some issues that are affecting Australia’s veterans. It is a vital that entitlements and services for veterans and their families are not eroded. I take this opportunity to highlight the promises that have been made and those still awaiting delivery. I am also working hard to develop policies to improve the circumstances of Australia’s veterans both now and into the future. Nevertheless, it is necessary to ask the tough questions today and, more importantly, it is necessary that the decisions that require action are made.

Accountability is an important element of our political system. Prior to the last election the Australian Labor Party raised a number of expectations for action in certain areas that impact on the veteran community. Shortly after the election, it must be said, there was a flurry of activity as a number of promises were ticked off. Lately, however, we have seen stalling on larger and more costly items. Some might suggest that this has occurred where the tougher and more difficult decisions were required. This is deeply concerning. Last night in Senate estimates the government indicated that it had no time line on promises made, particularly with regard to a number of reviews that are currently being undertaken or have already been undertaken. The government stone-walled on a number of questions.

What concerns me is that there are too many unanswered reviews and too much reckless spending, putting at risk the delivery of expected outcomes. We have the outstanding recommendations of the review of the Clarke review—yes, a review of a review. That report has been sitting on the minister’s desk waiting for an outcome for 12 months. From opposition he promised priority would be given to outstanding issues around nuclear veterans and British Commonwealth Occupation Force veterans. To date, there has been no action and no decision. Promises have been made and expectations raised. Understandably, the delay is damaging trust. Understandably, veterans are disappointed. Also underway is a review of the military compensation arrangements. The veteran community and the coalition hope that this review, once completed, will be answered not just with talk but with action. There is a review into the pharmaceutical copayment, a key promise from Labor in opposition which is yet to be delivered. Similar to some other reviews, there is no timetable for delivery. The coalition awaits the delivery of this key promise from the last election which, according to the minister, was a key objective to be addressed in their first term of government. We are still waiting.

Last year, the parliament reported on the F111 deseal-reseal program. The committee’s report was extensive and I call on the minister to respond. Studies into the health and wellbeing of veterans are vital, and the coalition supports ongoing investigation into improved ways to deal with health concerns of veterans. Importantly, though, this is another area where action is required rather than talk.
I want to touch briefly on the cost of living pressures facing the veteran community. Prior to the last election Labor’s plan for veterans’ affairs committed Labor to ‘protecting veterans from rising costs of living.’ This promise has not been kept. What a great shame it is that this nation has gone from no government debt and money in the bank to a projected net debt of $153 billion by June 2014. Labor’s debt fuelled spending binge will impact heavily on all Australians, but particularly those who are on a fixed income. This is jeopardising the delivery of key election promises to Australia’s veteran community.

In conclusion, can I say to the veteran community in Australia that the coalition remains committed to a stand-alone Department of Veterans’ Affairs and to ongoing care for our veterans and their families.

**Haiti: United Nations Staff**

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (4.54 pm)—On 13 January the television news started to penetrate Australia’s summer reverie with images of the devastation in Haiti caused by the earthquake that had occurred in the late afternoon of the previous day—the anguish on faces of shocked and terrified survivors, the bodies in the streets, the injured, the crushed buildings, and aerial views of the national palace, the cathedral and the Christopher Hotel, which housed the United Nations headquarters, all collapsed in ruins.

I talked on Monday in this place about the devastation suffered by the Haitian people in this disaster. Again, I offer to the citizens of Haiti my deepest condolences. This terrible event also resulted in the largest loss of staff lives in the UN’s history. Over a number of days the news emerged that almost 100 UN staff from 28 countries had perished in the mass of concrete and rubble. This included four of my friends—people I had worked and socialised with in Kosovo and Gaza. In such difficult places, your friends are your family.

Luiz Carlos da Costa was the deputy head of the UN stabilisation mission in Haiti. Words can hardly do justice to this gentleman of the world—a brilliant, warm, charismatic, soft-spoken Brazilian man who was also, as described by his wife at his memorial service, ‘drop-dead gorgeous’. Like the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Luiz started out in the UN as a messenger boy and worked his way up over four decades to one of the highest posts in the UN system. He was responsible for recruitment in UN peacekeeping for decades and he signed my own appointment letter when I started with the UN peacekeeping mission in Kosovo in 1999. Luiz was known for his professionalism and dedication to the UN, for his kindness and for his egalitarian treatment of staff and his fierce loyalty to them. As the secretary-general said in his condolence statement:

He was a mentor to generations of UN staff … His legacy lives in the thousands that serve under the blue flag in every corner of the globe.

I remember Luiz once telling me how sad he was at the death of his fellow countryman Sergio Vieira de Mello in the Baghdad bombing in 2003. What a devastating blow to Brazil, the UN and the international community to have now lost both of these incredible international civil servants. I worked with Luiz and his assistant Jerome Yap in Kosovo and later in New York. Jerome, from the Philippines, steadfastly supported Luiz over the last 15 years—accompanying him to Kosovo, Liberia and Haiti. Jerome was a happy person who loved to sing, and he was a member of the UN choir. I kept in touch with Jerome through Facebook but my last message to him went unanswered as he too was tragically killed in Haiti.
Emmanuel Rejouis, from France/Haiti, and Emily Sanson, from New Zealand, were friends of mine in Kosovo—staying with me and my housemate Matthew at one stage. They later married and had three beautiful daughters. After stints in many countries they were posted to Haiti. Emily was at work at the UN when the earthquake struck. She ran home to where Emmanuel was taking care of their daughters, but the building was collapsed. She found her youngest daughter Alyahna alive under Emmanuel’s body—he had been sheltering her when he died. Their other two little daughters did not survive. Emmanuel was a kind and gentle person who loved his family and his fellow human beings. Their daughters Kofi-Jade and Zenzie were beautiful and sassy children.

Another close friend lost in the Haiti quake was Jean-Philippe Laberge, a French-Canadian with whom I worked in Gaza, along with his wife Victoria. I was on the UNRWA panel that interviewed Jean-Philippe for the job as an Operations Support Officer in Gaza. I liked him immediately as he was smart and funny and laid back, while being completely professional. As his friends have noted in our condolence letter to Victoria and his mother Marjolaine: he had a mischievous style, which masked his essential shyness, and he was one of the most sensitive and caring persons you could meet as well as being a thoroughly reliable colleague and a true leader, making the right decisions in difficult and dangerous situations, as was often the case in Gaza.

The nicest New Year’s Eve I ever experienced was a few years ago at a party Jean-Philippe and Victoria held in Montreal. Many of the Gaza friends were together again—such a lot of champagne, such beautiful memories. In one of those strange coincidences, Jean-Philippe’s memorial service is happening now in Montreal as I speak and my thoughts are certainly with him and his family, especially Victoria and their two young children.

To all of my UN friends who are gone, it was a privilege to have known and worked alongside you. As one mourner put it:

You thought only of bringing good to the world—and—

… represented all that is best about the human race … Marcel Proust thought that people who have passed away remain with us through our memories of them. “It is as though,” he wrote, “they have gone abroad”.

So, then, Luiz, Jean-Philippe, Jerome and Emmanuel, you and your fallen colleagues have gone abroad to join Dag Hammarskjold, Sergio Vieira de Mello, Count Folke Bernadotte, Iain Hook, Jean-Selim Kanaan and many other UN soldiers for peace. But our memories of you will remain strongly with us and will fortify us in carrying on your work to restore dignity to the lives of the world’s most vulnerable. In the immortal words of Wordsworth:

What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind.

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

House adjourned at 5.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Lindsay To move:

That the House:

(1) recognises that Queensland teachers are dedicated educators who do their very best with limited resources and facilities provided by Education Queensland;

CHAMBER
(2) notes that the Queensland Minister for Education appears to be ignoring the concerns of teachers and parents in relation to staffing numbers and still uses 100 year old buildings with facilities to match;

(3) worries about the impact on students of classroom overcrowding, third world facilities, the ever increasing workload on our teachers, schools having to employ prisoners as groundsmen and the staff model used to allocate teaching positions to schools;

(4) condemns the Queensland Government over its continuing education budget cuts and apparent inaction over teacher concerns in relation to taking on the additional roles of parent, social worker, policeman, cleaner and information technology technician;

(5) questions if the Queensland Government can be serious about education noting its continuing comparison of private/public schools which have different teacher-to-student, budget-to-student and computer-to-student ratios; and

(6) calls on the Queensland Education Minister to listen to teachers and accept their advice and counsel.

**Ms Jackson** To present a Bill for an Act to establish an Airport Development Ombudsman, and for related purposes.

**Mr Champion** To move:

That the House:

(1) notes the Hillier fire in SA which burnt 45 hectares of land and two sheds and threatened further property on Wednesday 10 February 2010;

(2) commends the:

(a) efforts of the local Country Fire Service (CFS), including the crew of the Nu-rooopa CFS which was the first on the scene, for managing to prevent further property loss; and

(b) CFS and Metropolitan Fire Service members of the Gumeracha, Dalkieth, Gawler River, Hamley Bridge, Owen Balaklava, Salisbury, Angaston, Tanunda, Truro, Two Wells, Mallala, Freeling, Gawler, Elizabeth, Roseworthy and Lyndoch crews for their efforts in containing the fire under severe weather conditions; and

(3) acknowledges the value of the CFS for the safety and protection of rural communities and properties.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

McPherson Electorate: Australia Day

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (9.30 am)—Australia Day is a day to reflect on what we have achieved as a nation. It is a day for each of us to commit to making Australia an even better place for the future and it is a day when we welcome our newest Aussies—those people who have decided to make Australia their home. Citizenship ceremonies take place right around the nation, and in my electorate of McPherson I was proud to attend two such ceremonies as the presiding officer.

Today I want to pay tribute to the two wonderful organisations and the people involved who host these events each year. Both organisations have actually hosted these citizenship ceremonies since 2005 and, as presiding officer at both events, I want to extend my personal thanks to all those people involved in the organisation. Both events were very special to me this year as they will be my last as the member for McPherson. As someone who took out Australian citizenship many years ago, I can relate to these new Aussies. I can relate to the final decision each has made to become an Australian and what it will mean to each of them in the future.

My first thanks go to Currumbin RSL, to the President, Mr Ron Workman OAM, and the many veterans who attended the ceremony this year, to Vice President, Bill Thompson, Gordon, Brian, the two Rons, club patron Mr Sam Dixon OAM, to name but a few, and Robin Beard from the Mudgeeraba Light Horse, who attended dressed in his uniform of the Light Horse. This year we were joined by a very special guest, Mr Keith Payne VC, OAM, who is the last living Australian recipient of the original Victoria Cross. Keith was joined by his wife, Flo, and Marg Workman, two very special ladies. Also in attendance on the day was the Deputy Mayor of the Gold Coast, Councillor Daphne McDonald and Cheryl from Currumbin RSL, who undertook all the plans for the day. To all of you, my special thanks on behalf of our new Aussie citizens and me for making the morning so memorable.

The second ceremony was held at the Mudgeeraba Memorial Hall and was hosted by the Lions Club of Mudgeeraba. The Lions Club, as I said at the beginning, has also hosted this evening since 2005. I want to thank Lions President, Russell White, for his support of the event this year. The Lions provided a wonderful Aussie barbeque for the new Aussies. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate Australia Day than with plenty of sausages and rissoles, all washed down with a cold beer. Special thanks must go to Lion Ken Phillips, Lion George O’Brien and Lion Vic Knowles for the excellent support they give this annual event. Councillor Ted Shepherd and his wife, Sue, have also supported this event each year and were there again this year. Our new Aussies at this ceremony get to sing some great Aussie songs and hear some bush poetry reading, including The Man from Snowy River, from George O’Brien. All in all it is a great fun evening, sharing plenty of Aussie humour, great Aussie tucker and Aussie camaraderie.

I will always have fond memories of both these events, the organisations involved, the people involved and of course our very new Australian citizens.
Hindmarsh Electorate: Camden Classic Carnival

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.33 am)—I rise today to talk about a fantastic event in the electorate of Hindmarsh that took place last Sunday, 7 February. That was the Camden Classic Carnival, an athletics meet in Camden Park at the Camden oval in my electorate. It is sponsored by the City of West Torrens and it was the 31st such event that has been held. It is very similar to the Bay Sheffield day that my friend the member for Barker would be very familiar with. Athletes from all around Australia turn up to participate and it is really a great fun family day.

There were foot races for men and women, from 120 metres to 1,600 metres in length. The big highlights of the day were the 400-metre Camden Classic races for men and women. There were also many other races—the Thirsty Camel 400-metre Women’s Classic and the Messenger Community News 400-metre Camden Classic. The winner of the men’s Camden Classic was James Boden of Highbury. He is a member of the Tea Tree Gully Athletics Club. The winner of the women’s Camden Classic was Lucy Buckley from the suburb of Glenelg in my electorate. She is a member of the Western District Athletics Club. Both Classic winners were trained by the same coach, Mr Paul Young. Results were achieved in many other races during the day, from under-17 events to over-35 events and even an SANFL umpires event, which was taken out by Mark Hardham, who succeeded in the Andrew Vickers 400-metre Memorial umpires race.

This event has a special place in the western suburbs and I would like to congratulate all those people who put time and effort into making it happen: the president, Brendan Golden; the senior vice president, Colin Rowston, who does a lot of the organisational work and does such great work to put this show on every year; the junior vice president, John Turner; the male athletes representative, Omin Shahadi; the female athletes representative, Zoe Kennedy; and many, many others.

As I said, the event was sponsored by the City of West Torrens, and the mayor, John Trainer, was there with me together with Councillor George Demetriou. We spent a fantastic afternoon talking to the athletes and watching the races. On the Friday night prior to the event the annual dinner was on. The athletes were there with their families enjoying the barbecue that we had at Camden Oval and it was great fun. It was attended by at least 150 people together with their families, and it was great to see lots of young kids participating in a great family event. (Time expired)

Grey Electorate: Drought

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (9.36 am)—I rise to inform the House that the 2009-10 harvest in South Australia has been one of the best for many years. Following years of drought, it has come as a welcome relief and it will allow most farms to restore some balance to their operations to start the new season. It is expected that the total harvest will exceed eight million tonnes and be one of the biggest on record. While growers have been disappointed by the falling prices in the last six months or so, they still remain close to the 10-year average with most damage being inflicted by the relatively high value of the Australian dollar, in part propelled by the government’s reckless borrowing and spending policies.

However, as always, life is not fair to all and, although there are other pockets around the state, I am particularly concerned about the hundred or so farms on the eastern Eyre Peninsula
in the Cowell, Cleve and Arno Bay districts who are still suffering from severe drought. The National Rural Advisory Council has recently visited South Australia and will shortly recommend to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Tony Burke, as to whether exceptional circumstances assistance should be continued for the many regions in the state currently declared. This will include the eastern Eyre zone which covers a much larger area than just the affected farms, and there are fears that if NRAC treat the region as a whole, they may recommend to withdraw support. Banks in the area have only been lending to some farmers on the proviso they are eligible for EC funding, and I am concerned that if the rug is pulled prematurely, banks will withdraw finance triggering lower land values with severe consequences for the local communities.

I have written to Minister Burke informing him of the situation and, in the event of NRAC recommending the end to exceptional circumstances in the eastern Eyre zone, urging him to declare a subzone for the continuation of support of these affected farmers. A number of farmers from the area have contacted me and morale is very low. I have personal experience with extended drought and the effects it has on farming communities. The reality is one of year-on-year failures, no matter what effort an individual contributes, and a sliding further into debt every year with the weight of responsibility to others hanging heavily on the individual. These are the experiences of those who live with extended and exceptional drought. I have serious concerns for the welfare and health of some. It is hard enough to endure a drought at any time. It is even more difficult when almost everywhere else is enjoying a good season. I urge the minister not to abandon these 100 farms.

Robertson Electorate: Radiotherapy Service

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (9.38 am)—I rise today to inform members of my continuing campaign for a public radiotherapy service on the coast and to correct the record in relation to radio ads presently being run on the Central Coast. Simon Benson, in an article published today on page 3 of the Daily Telegraph, made a number of claims that are entirely false. False claim No. 1: it is entirely false that party officials will investigate allegations regarding radio ads placed on Central Coast radio by me as stated in the article. False claim No. 2: it is entirely false that there is any breach of party rules in running such ads as stated in the article. False claim No. 3: it is entirely false that any complaint has been received by the New South Wales ALP office in relation to the ads as stated in the article. In fact, no complaint has been received by any party office.

This false story was published in the Daily Telegraph, despite Mr Benson being advised by the New South Wales ALP General Secretary that these three allegations were untrue. The general secretary had also informed Mr Benson that these ads had been planned and approved for a very long period of time—in fact, since last year—and that there was no difficulty in his mind with those proceeding on the radio. I call on the Daily Telegraph to correct the record and inform the public of the false nature of the article.

Radio ads are produced to inform constituents of my campaign to achieve a public radiotherapy service on the Central Coast to treat patients in the local area who are suffering from cancer. Presently, cancer sufferers who need radiotherapy must travel to Sydney or Newcastle, which may involve further suffering, pay for private services or give up life-saving treatment altogether. I have raised this matter many times in the parliament and in the community, and I will continue to do so. I have presented to the parliament a petition on this matter signed by
some 18,000 residents of the Central Coast. The ads have also set out the benefits delivered to the seat of Robertson by me and the Labor federal government since the last election. I certainly consider it my obligation to inform my constituents of what the government is achieving for them. I will briefly go through some of the benefits. They include $840 million for a freight rail between Sydney and Newcastle and $81 million for the Mardi-Mangrove Creek Dam.

What I clearly want to say in listing these matters is that I have an obligation to inform my constituents. It is clearly set out in parliamentary entitlements that communicating with, and informing, constituents about issues or other matters that have been raised or discussed in the parliament is clearly within my obligations and entitlements. I would go so far as to say that to prevent me is a breach of my entitlements and obligations.

Gilmore Electorate: Digital Black Spots

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.42 am)—I rise to bring to the attention of the House a matter that is of interest and concern to all Australians: television. According to Roy Morgan research, in a typical week during 2007, the average Australian adult spends 21 hours and 46 minutes watching television. That was 27 per cent more than time spent listening to the radio, 146 per cent more than time on the internet, 545 per cent more than time spent reading newspapers and 1,068 per cent more than time spent reading magazines. You can imagine how upset these people would be if they were not able to access TV reception, which is why I am very concerned about my constituents in Gilmore, who are living in some of the digital black spot areas. I am particularly concerned about those who are not recognised by this government as being in a black spot. I put out a press release early in January this year informing people about the official time the switchover will occur on the South Coast from analog to digital TV.

I mentioned a report by the digital ready task force, which published the government’s digital black spot list featuring two subgroups from the Gilmore electorate—Kangaroo Valley and Berry. People from the community were then invited to let me know if they feel that they are in a black spot area that was not mentioned. My office was inundated with calls from people up and down the South Coast. We began compiling our own black spot list to give to the government as a way of appealing for both recognition and assistance. The list was as follows: Jaspers Brush—Cedar Vale Lane and Croziers Road; Bellawongarah—Kangaroo Valley Road; Sussex Inlet—River Road; Government Road and Springs Road, Bundewallah; Coolangatta—Bolong Road and Northview Close; Gerringong; Rose Valley; Kiama; Basin View; Beaumont; Berry—Borrowdale Close; Jamberoo; Sanctuary Point; and, of course, Kangaroo Valley. That is a total of 14 suburbs all up so far. The government now has that list.

When my office asked the digital task force what sort of assistance would be provided to these people and when the digital task force would act, they did not know. When we asked whether it would happen before the switchover and whether they could guarantee that no-one would miss out, they could not say. When we asked whether residents in these areas would have to pay for satellites on their roofs, they could not tell us the details—not even how much it would cost or even when we would all be enlightened. For those who already have satellites we cannot even find out what the transition will look like for them. I have to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I tried to watch my digital TV last weekend and, because of the rain, I
Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (9.44 am)—During the last week attention has been drawn yet again to the way that Iran is positioning itself as a nuclear player. As the House is aware, another matter of grave concern is the ongoing human rights situation in that country, particularly the increased discrimination against minority groups. I particularly want to mention the seven Baha’i leaders who have been detained in Evin prison since 2008. The second session of their trial was held on Sunday this week, 7 February, before the Revolutionary Court in Tehran.

The Baha’is are Iran’s largest non-Muslim religious minority but are not recognised by the state and do not have the right to practise their religion. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has said that the Iranian government is using its justice system as an instrument of religious persecution. Reports also state that the defendants were formally charged with espionage, propaganda activities against the Islamic order, the establishment of an illegal administration, sending secret documents outside the country, acting against the security of the country and something that is called ‘corruption on earth’. I am advised that the final charge under Islamic law is a crime punishable by the death sentence in Iran. Needless to say, all of these charges have been categorically denied by the defendants. It is widely believed that the seven Baha’i were detained on the sole basis of their faith. Prior to their arrest they served as an appointed ad hoc group known as the ‘friends’. Their role was to manage the minimum spiritual and material needs of Iran’s Baha’i community. That was a role that was carried out with the government’s knowledge.

I have previously met with representatives of a very active group of Baha’i in my electorate of Bennelong and I know that groups all over the country held prayers last Sunday in support of the seven detained Baha’i. Many members of the Baha’i faith in this country have friends and relatives back in Iran who have suffered. They tell terrible stories of having a knock on the door in the middle of the night and then immediate arrest and detention.

In December 2009 United Nations passed a resolution that expressed concern over the continued deterioration of human rights in Iran. I condemn in the strongest terms the arbitrary nature of the arrest of these seven Baha’i members in Iran and their long detention without access to legal counsel. I call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to recognise international standards of human rights and take their place as a responsible member of the international community.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (9.47 am)—On 23 October last year I attended the 60th birthday of the Country Women’s Association Dunsborough branch. As you would expect, CWA ladies came from near and far to celebrate this wonderful milestone and the success of the Dunsborough branch, formerly known as the Yallingup branch. This branch started in 1949. It had very few members in those early days, but that is not the case in 2010—they have a very vibrant group of members now. One of them has been a member since the very beginning. She found the association after she had moved away from her original home with her two chil-
The CWA branch members are dedicated to providing for their communities, whether through establishing support networks, providing welfare in times of need or even assisting with educational opportunities. The ladies continue to make soft toys for the hospitals, they gather food and necessities for hampers during the festive season, and of course they are well known for their fabulous baking: their biscuits, their slices and their cakes for various events and functions. If there is ever a community emergency then you can guarantee that the CWA ladies will be there as volunteers helping out.

My afternoon with the CWA—which the ladies tell me stands for ‘chicks with attitude’—included listening to the local primary school choir and the Our Lady of the Cape choir. They sang an old-time medley. Many of the ladies were presented with badges commemorating their 10 years of service to the Dunsborough CWA branch. That is a wonderful achievement. We also heard the three-piece Dunsborough branch music group, who delighted us with a singalong. As you can imagine it was very parochial with songs like *I Still Call Australia Home* and *Waltzing Matilda*. They were a great group. Their celebration was a real chance for the CWA women to continue to discuss their concerns and issues.

We even had the local police officer, Craig Anderson, present. He talked about the upcoming ‘leavers event’ that happens in Dunsborough and throughout the south-west. I believe that this Dunsborough branch is an inspiration to the community. The motto of its members is one of ‘service to the country through country women, for country women and by country women’. I congratulate the Dunsborough branch on its 60th anniversary. I can guarantee that they certainly live up to this motto.

Hashluck Electorate: Midvale Early Childhood and Parenting Centre

Ms JACKSON (Hashluck) (9.50 am)—One of the most enjoyable aspects of being a member of this place is the diverse range of people, agencies and businesses that you have contact with and learn about. Today I would like to tell you about a service that I have seen grow and diversify in an attempt to improve the life chances, health and prosperity of many disadvantaged families in the local community. During my first term in the parliament I gained a positive impression of the then Midvale Childcare Centre, which had provided long day care, family day care and inclusion support for many years. In recent years it has broadened its range of services as the Midvale Early Childhood and Parenting Centre hub. It now also provides nine supported playgroups, toy libraries, teacher directed three- and four-year-old kindergarten programs, a range of parenting programs, childcare professional development programs, adult education programs and volunteer training programs.

The Midland-Midvale area in my electorate is one of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged in Perth, with a high percentage of Indigenous families and an increasing number of families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and families who are disadvantaged or at risk due to issues surrounding poverty, unemployment, ill health, substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness. There is a high percentage of children under five years of age in the local community, and the Australian Early Development Index scores of these children show a high level of language and cognitive vulnerability, emotional immaturity and lack of social competence. It is this disadvantage and the critical unmet needs of the children that have led to the expansion of services by the hub.
The hub continues to evolve to meet the needs identified by the local community through ongoing consultation and relationship building. With a philosophy that recognises that each community is unique and deserving of cultural respect, the hub works within the community in a collaborative and negotiating partnership. The hub holds that a child’s wellbeing is the central core of its services, recognising the influence and importance of family and the wider community in the health, growth and development of a child. It has recognised that family is the greatest support and influence for raising healthy children, so many of the hub programs are designed to support and empower parents in this role.

The hub has also developed strong links with all local primary schools and with a range of local health, education and family support services—and I could mention all of them—including government, non-government and community organisations. The two local councils, the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring, are in partnership with the hub and have a strong commitment to the services. Most recently the hub has been piloting the new early years learning framework and will provide training and professional development for local carers and educators during implementation.

I applaud the excellent work already undertaken by the Midvale Early Childhood and Parenting Centre hub and their staff, who are committed to addressing the still unmet needs of the Indigenous and disadvantaged families in the Midland-Midvale district.

Indi Electorate: Defence

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (9.53 am)—I rise this morning to commend a local company, Bruck Textiles, from Wangaratta in my electorate that has invested in its workers and in research and innovation to develop the wonderful camouflage fabric that our Australian soldiers wear and to highlight that the current Minister for Defence needs to make a commitment to local workers that he will not allow the purchase of camouflage fabric from China in future contracts.

We saw yesterday an embarrassing backdown. After there was an admission from an official in Defence and from the Labor candidate in my electorate that there would be fabric purchased from China, the minister backed down in a very embarrassing display. Had that issue not been raised in the media, I am sure that he would not have backed down. So at a time when we have the most successful textile mill in Australia working hard to innovate and keep jobs in Australia, we hear that a Chinese contractor has underbid the locals by about 10 per cent, saving, at best—and this is a disputed figure—$1.5 million. How pathetic.

On the same day that this government was going to export to China 400 jobs in Wangaratta and taxpayer funded know-how, we hear of the embarrassing debacle regarding the foil insulation program of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts that could take up to $50 million to remedy. Here the government is trying to gut Australian manufacturing and export Australian jobs for a measly $1½ million at best—and that is a disputed figure; some advice tells me it is not beyond $500,000—and yet its gross incompetence could see $50 million from Australian taxpayers required to fix the problem and it is still not accountable for it.

Why was this allowed to happen in Defence? Why has the minister not come clean and guaranteed that future camouflage will not be bought from China? Why will he not come clean and tell us of other Defence contracts in the pipeline that will put Australian jobs and Australian industries at risk? I will tell you why: because he is not on the ball. He has spent all
his time on climate change covering up for the adequacies of his minister in the Senate, Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Wong, and the rest of his time having breakfast, lunch and dinner in Copenhagen. He is not on the ball, he does not know what is happening in Defence, but he will have to get to know what is happening in Defence very quickly because I will pursue these contracts. The minister will have to come clean over the next few weeks and months about what Australian jobs and industries he is putting at risk and what know-how and jobs he is exporting to China.

**Kingston Electorate: Voluntary Organisations**

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.56 am)—I rise to talk about some of the great work that is done by local organisations in my electorate. In particular, I would like to speak about the work done over the Christmas period. We all know that Christmas is an important time for a lot of families to get together, but for those families that struggle and those families that do not have enough money or are living in poverty Christmas can be a very distressing time, perhaps because they are not able to get together with families, put a Christmas lunch together or buy presents for their kids. When this need exists, there are organisations that really step up to the plate and help those families that might be struggling to have a great Christmas.

I was very pleased to visit the Salvation Army at Noarlunga, where they were putting together packages for local people who needed some assistance. What was really lovely about how the Salvation Army put together presents is that they do not impose on people what presents their children might want. Instead, they assist parents by getting them to come in and look at what is available and let them choose what presents they would like for their children. I think that was very empowering, although it was quite overwhelming for some parents. They were so overwhelmed perhaps by gratitude that this process was in place and also because so many people had donated presents such as toys that they could choose from and ensure that their children had a great Christmas.

Similar things happened at Anglicare at St Hilary’s, which is just around the corner from my office. I also attended there and helped them distribute both food hampers and presents. Once again there were a lot of needy people. We know last year was a tough year for many, despite Australia doing very well. Certainly the people in my community were very grateful that these local organisations stepped up and ensured that they had a really fabulous Christmas. I commend the work that they do. Other community organisations put on Christmas carols and events that people could come to free of charge so that the community could come together in the Christmas spirit. These events were all run by volunteers, and I would like to congratulate those volunteers for making Christmas a very special time for many people.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 3) 2009-2010**

Cognate bill:

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 4) 2009-2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by **Dr Emerson**:

That this bill be now read a second time.
Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (10.00 am)—The management of the nation’s economy is defining the first term of the Rudd government, a government that is successfully steering the nation through the worst global recession since the Great Depression. There is no doubt that the early and decisive action of the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, supported by his economics team—the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner—ensured that we have avoided a recession in this country. The bank guarantee and the economic stimulus plan were critical to ensuring the nation’s economy continued to grow, and we have seen that economic stimulus plan and the confidence engendered through the bank guarantee support hundreds of thousands of jobs across this country.

The Rudd government’s economic stimulus plan is making a real difference in communities like mine in Far North Queensland, including in my own electorate of Leichhardt. In Far North Queensland unemployment doubled and is still above 10 per cent. It would have been much worse if the government had not stepped in and taken action when the private sector was in retreat as a result of the global recession. We need to recognise that. The broader community recognises that. Even the most right-leaning newspaper in this country, the Australian, recognised that when they made the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, their Australian of the Year in direct response to the actions he had taken to steer this country through the global recession.

Yet every step of the way we have been opposed by the Liberal and National parties in this parliament. If those opposite had been in government, we would have gone into recession and thousands more people would have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. I have visited schools and other building projects like roads across my electorate and met with builders, trades and labourers who would not have had work if it had not been for the economic stimulus plan.

Small, medium and larger businesses have also benefited. The small business tax break has been particularly important in supporting businesses in my electorate. The Assistant Treasurer, Nick Sherry, was in my electorate last year and we met with Ray and Judy Lanarch from PTS traffic management, who have benefited directly from the small business tax break and have been able to expand their business. Derek Ross of Pressure Pumps North Queensland also had a story about a small business that has actually grown during these difficult economic times, and that is a direct result of the benefits that have flown from the small business tax break. So there is no doubt that thousands more businesses would have gone broke and thousands more people would have been unemployed if the government had not acted so early and decisively in response to this crisis. That stands in stark contrast to the continued opposition we have had to our actions throughout these difficult times.

But, as I have said, the government has also given specific attention to regions like the one that I represent in Far North Queensland. We have experienced some of the fastest increases in and highest rates of unemployment in the country. The Cairns region was identified as a priority employment area, and our local employment coordinator, Peter Doutre, is working hard in partnership with local business and community leaders to further develop a jobs plan for the region. The Minister for Employment Participation, Mark Arbib, and Parliamentary Secretary Jason Clare visited Cairns following this announcement to host a Keep Australia Working forum attended by almost 100 local businesses and community leaders.
Following on from that, we have had major projects forums. They were held last year in partnership with the Queensland government, who are also stepping in with a major infrastructure building program to support jobs. We wanted to make sure that local businesses could access those contracts and we had a major project forum to inform local businesses about the projects that are available and how they could tender and get involved in those projects. There have been a range of Jobs Fund projects announced following on from the recognition of Cairns as a priority employment area—projects that are funding a new community centre as well as walking and bike tracks—to further support employment in the region.

The Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Craig Emerson, visited Cairns to host a roundtable between the business and banking sectors to discuss the availability of finance in the region. We are in a situation in Cairns where the construction industry has been particularly hard hit because of the GFC, which went on and became the global recession. The banking industry has been in retreat as a result of that. Projects that previously would have got finance have had difficulty getting finance. What we have seen particularly in Far North Queensland is real concern about the banks re-evaluating risk in our region and not supporting the construction industry with projects that are still worth while and should be funded. The minister for small business came to Cairns and got the big banks there, including the Australian Bankers Association. He sat down with local business to work through this problem. I am still not necessarily happy with the way that the banks are responding to some projects in my area but I think it was important for us to sit down and have that frank conversation. We will continue to work through these issues as part of our response to the global economic downturn that we are particularly feeling in Cairns.

Prior to Christmas the Prime Minister visited Cairns to attend a jobs expo organised by Centrelink. More than 100 employers participated and 5½ thousand people attended the expo, and more than 300 people got a job as a direct result of that day. More than 300 individuals and families have had their lives changed by getting a job as a direct result of the government establishing the region as a priority employment area and supporting the jobs expo. The flow-on of more than 300 jobs out of just that day is the sort of thing that this government is doing, not only nationally but locally, making a real difference in local communities like the one that I represent.

As well as visiting the jobs expo, on that day the Prime Minister made a number of announcements to further support jobs in the region, including regulatory reforms to attract new aviation carriers to Cairns. For many years the local tourism industry has wanted to see aviation regulatory reforms that would encourage international carriers into Cairns and encourage them to triangulate through Cairns into some of the capital cities—Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. We have delivered that reform.

The Prime Minister announced almost $19.5 million in funding to establish the Cairns Institute at James Cook University. This builds on a commitment to and construction of a $50 million dental school, strengthening our local education sector. The Prime Minister announced the bringing forward of $60 million in housing economic stimulus projects. They were in the National Economic Stimulus Plan, but there is a real recognition in Cairns that the construction industry is struggling and that the private sector is in retreat. I worked cooperatively with Minister Arbib, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Government Service Delivery, and the state government to ensure that that could happen.
We announced a task force to work with business on cash flow problems they may be facing as a result of the global recession. There are many businesses in Cairns that have been going through some difficult times in an economy dependent on tourism and construction, both hard hit by the global recession. It has seen businesses struggling at times with cash flow. The business community spoke to me and Minister Arbib. We worked with them and Assistant Treasurer Nick Sherry to bring forward a task force that is now working with businesses in my electorate.

We announced further support to develop farm tourism, because the tourism industry has been doing it tough with the recession in Japan and we have seen flight cuts. We need to diversify and strengthen the tourism industry. We are doing a lot in that area, but there was a further announcement of half a million dollars to Advance Cairns to further work with the farm tourism sector. Through the Office of Northern Australia and Regional Development Australia, we have made a commitment and we are continuing to work with local business and community leaders to strengthen and diversify our local economy. So it is not only a plan for today; we are also planning for the medium and long term, working with Advance Cairns and Regional Development Australia and supporting that effort through the department of infrastructure and the Office of Northern Australia.

I would like to thank Advance Cairns, particularly their chairman, Russell Beer; their deputy chairman, Rose-Marie Dash; their CEO, Ross Contarino; board member and chair of the Cairns Chamber of Commerce Jeremy Blockey; Mayor Val Schier; and business consultant Tim Grau, who visited Canberra in the lead-up to the Prime Minister’s visit. Working in partnership with them and the government, we have been able to bring forward and successfully secure this very important package to support jobs in Cairns. I would like to particularly thank the Minister for Employment Participation, Mark Arbib, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment, Jason Clare, who visited Cairns on more than one occasion to work in partnership with me and the business leaders I have just thanked in developing this targeted response to the unemployment problem we face in Cairns and the broader region.

A lot was done last year, as I have already said, in terms of the Rudd government’s economic response to the financial crisis and support not only for the broader economy but particularly for regions like mine. We are not out of the woods yet, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. I am very optimistic about the future when we look at what is ahead. The Australian and Queensland governments continue to support the construction industry through nation-building infrastructure projects. The Rudd government alone is funding 2,100 projects representing $460 million in economic stimulus investment in North Queensland. On top of these economic stimulus projects are projects being delivered as a result of election commitments and the orderly business of government, including a dental school at James Cook University; a GP superclinic in Edmonton, which I recently announced; trade training centres, including a marine skills training centre being built in Cairns and trade training centres in the Torres Strait; and the recently announced upgrade of the Horn Island airstrip in partnership with the Queensland government. This is very important infrastructure in my electorate of Leichhardt. There have been social housing projects and upgrades to local roads, including the Bruce Highway and the Peninsula Development Road. Many of these projects are now under construction or will be built this year.
The Rudd government continues to support the tourism industry, announcing this year another $1 million in marketing funding for tropical North Queensland to attract visitors from New Zealand, China and Japan. This builds on a $4 million package announced when Qantas cut flights to Japan and the recently announced regulatory reforms were introduced to attract new airlines to Cairns, as I described earlier. The partnership between Cairns Airport and Jetstar will see 300,000 domestic and international seats return to Cairns over the next 2½ years. This agreement has been supported with marketing funds from the Australian and Queensland governments. This is 100,000 more seats than the number of seats cut when Qantas cut flights to Japan in July 2007. Continental and Pacific Blue have also recently announced new services to Cairns, and we are going to see thousands of Chinese tourists visiting Cairns this weekend for Chinese New Year, supported through marketing funding from the Australian government working in partnership with Tourism Tropical North Queensland. ‘Kung hei fat choi’ to any of those Cantonese Chinese listeners out there. I am looking forward to attending the Chinese New Year celebrations in my electorate this weekend. We have many Chinese tourists already in Cairns—I saw them when I was home last weekend—and I encourage anybody who sees Chinese people around Australia this coming weekend to wish them a happy new year. Chinese New Year is very important to them in the same way that Christmas is very important in this country. I encourage people to make them feel very welcome in what we know is the world’s most hospitable country, Australia, and the country’s most hospitable place, Cairns.

Following the PM’s allowance last year, the Taxation Office is now working with businesses to ensure that those who may be having problems meeting their payments are given every chance to get through these difficult economic times. Last year, working with the businesses in our community, we announced a tax task force. That task force started work in January, and it rang 1,100 small businesses in my electorate in the lead-up to their visit to Cairns during the first week of February to offer support to local businesses. As I said, some businesses have been struggling with cash flow problems as a result of the global recession. A total of 106 businesses expressed interest and 60 have now taken advantage of this service to work with the tax office on financial plans so that they are given every opportunity to trade through these difficult economic times. I would like to thank Minister Sherry for the work he has done in partnership with me and the local business community on this.

So a lot is being done by the Rudd government to support traditional industries like tourism and construction in Far North Queensland, including in my electorate of Leichhardt. We need, though, to continue to diversify and strengthen our local economy. This must be a major focus of the government in partnership with business and community leaders as we move forward. The work of Regional Development Australia will be important in this effort and I look forward to working with Andrew Griffiths, the new chair of this committee, as they develop a roadmap for the region over the coming year. I look forward to continuing to partner with Advance Cairns and its member organisations, including Tourism Tropical North Queensland, the Cairns Chamber of Commerce and the local Cairns Port Authority. There are real opportunities to strengthen the tourism industry, diversifying it into new markets around events tourism, health tourism, adventure tourism and Indigenous tourism to attract new people and new tourism opportunities to our local region.
The region also needs to tap into the resources sector to diversify the local economy. New and existing mines are likely to face labour and skill shortages in the near future, and there are opportunities for Cairns and the region to become a mining services centre for Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The region is also well positioned to become an education hub for Australia and the Asia-Pacific region and needs to seize this opportunity. The Rudd government is investing in a new dental school at Cairns Institute at JCU, a new marine skills training centre, a new school and TAFE facilities. Combined with a well-established aviation skills centre and English language schools, the region can meet most educational needs. These facilities, combined with the region’s friendly people and natural appeal as a tourism destination, make it a very attractive place to get an education.

These are just two opportunities to diversify the economy and we need to continue to work on others such as expanding the aviation and marine services sectors and opportunities for arts and culture, including Indigenous arts and culture. Working together, we can build a better future for our region. That is what I am committed to do, working with the local business and community leaders, working with the executive of our government, to make a real difference in our local communities.

As I said at the start of this speech, the Rudd government has steered and is steering this country through some of the most difficult economic times the world has experienced. It stands in stark contrast to our opponents, who have opposed our action every step of the way. This year is a very important year. We need to continue to roll out our economic stimulus plan, we need to continue to support the tourism industry in my electorate and we need to continue to work on that longer term plan. But there is a real risk this year with an election coming up that those plans will be put in jeopardy because of the opposition. We have already seen Senator Macdonald this week in Senate estimates talking about further delays to the much-needed upgrade to the Bruce Highway in my electorate—a $150 million election commitment. Planning has been done and we have got three options on the table. We are reducing them down to one in the first half of this year and I want to see construction start later this year. It is a $150 million upgrade of the Bruce Highway south of Cairns, much needed to fix traffic congestion problems. The former member delivered no significant funding to upgrade the Bruce Highway south of Cairns, and what we have got now is Senator Ian Macdonald in Senate estimates talking about alternative routes that were ruled out 10 years ago under a planning study done by the state when the Howard government was in power, because they do not have the funding for this election commitment, they do not have the funding to upgrade the Bruce Highway, and they are now looking to delay. Residents of the southern suburbs of Cairns want this highway fixed and they need it fixed, and that is what I am committed to doing. I would appreciate some clarification from the LNP in Queensland as to whether they are going to support this election commitment and this plan to upgrade the Bruce Highway.

Their position stands in stark contrast to our position. We are supporting the economy. We are supporting the country through these difficult economic times. The opposition has opposed those measures and, as we have seen now, the current Leader of the Opposition has said very clearly that he was not that focused on or interested in economics in the past, and now he is the Leader of the Opposition he has got the shadow Treasurer, Joe Hockey, who in the last week has been out parading in a tutu, and we have got the finance spokesman in Senator...
Joyce, who has made some pretty unbelievable statements in recent times, including that Australia may have difficulty paying back its debt, when we are envied across the world for the way we have responded to the global recession, steered this country through this economic crisis. We have got one of the lowest debt levels in the OECD. It is scaremongering of the worst type for base political gain. You have got to stack their economic team up against ours. The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, and the finance minister, Lindsay Tanner, are up against Mr Abbott, Mr Hockey and Senator Joyce. These are the teams that people will have to choose between at the end of the year: a Prime Minister recognised by a right-wing journal in this country effectively, the Australian, as Australian of the Year, as compared to a budgie-smuggler wearing Leader of the Opposition, a tutu wearing shadow Treasurer and a finance spokesperson who is so in pursuit of the one-liner that he will say just about anything to get himself in the media. That is the real choice. Does this country risk having that opposition manage this country through what continue to be globally difficult economic times?

I am optimistic about the future. We have done a lot in Cairns and my region in the past year to support jobs. There is much more work to be done, including the development and implementation of a plan to diversify our local economy. That is what I am about. I will continue to deliver locally our economic stimulus plan and I will continue to deliver our election commitments. We will continue to work with local business and community leaders to ensure that we can support jobs going forward. We do not want to risk this by electing a Liberal-National Party government at the end of this year.

Mr Danby (Melbourne Ports) (10.20 am)—I was very pleased to see this morning the government introducing legislation arising out of recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. Such legislation will fix the rort introduced by the previous government at the last election to close the rolls early to prevent young people voting. There are a number of other matters that the government must address to make sure that the democratic franchise in Australia remains as wide as possible, which is after all the responsibility of this parliament, particularly given the fact that we in this country have a compulsory voting system.

In debating the appropriation bills, I would like to raise the issue of disenfranchisement and the need to invest in our electoral system in a wider way. As at the end of September 2009, according to public testimony by Mr Killesteyn, the excellent Electoral Commissioner of the Australian Electoral Commission, just last week, 1.39 million Australians were not enrolled. Fully one-third of these people are aged between 18 and 25. All of these people would have been unable to exercise their democratic rights at a federal election. In the 2007 federal election, 92.3 per cent of the population voted and the AEC estimates that in 2009 only 90.9 per cent were enrolled. This downward trend in enrolment, especially among young people in Australia, is of deep concern. More and more 18- to 25-year-olds are being disenfranchised and turned away from voting booths. During this election year thousands of 18-year-olds will be eligible to vote and it is their fundamental right to vote and to make a decision as to who represents them. Therefore, we have to work very hard to change legislation in Australia to make that more easily possible. All members of parliament understand why this is happening.

Over the last decade Australia has used a very wide system of data matching—for which the Electoral Commission uses the acronym CRU, continuous roll update—to make sure that
we are aware of people’s latest changes of address. The Electoral Commission uses this information to match data from agencies such as the Roads and Traffic Authority in New South Wales and electricity boards to work out that someone has changed their address and it takes people off the roll when they move from an address. We, as members of parliament, are all aware of this because we get return mail when we write to people in our electorate. The Electoral Commission, by law, is not allowed to put these people on at their new address, even if they live in the same electorate and even if the commission knows that they are there. The Electoral Commission has to send them a piece of snail mail—hard mail—and the person must write their name on the letter and send it back, saying, ‘Yes, I am here.’ Unless they actually go through that act, those people are not re-enrolled. That is why we had the undemocratic situation at the last election of 800 to 900 people per seat—people who actually lived in an electorate but who had moved house within that seat—turning up to a polling place but being denied their vote. It is a scandal and, in my view, changed the results in four seats at the last federal election. I am sure the Liberal Party in a close election would be very happy that their specially organised system of increasing identity requirements for provisional voters in particular disenfranchised those 800 to 900 people per seat. Political observers like Malcolm Mackerras, Professor Brian Coster and Professor Brent have established that those provisional voters would probably have voted between 50 and 60 per cent between Green and Labor. Slicing off that piece of the salami was the intention of the change to the identity rules for provisional voting.

Let me turn to the issue of campaign donations. Over the past year, both sides of politics have been coming up with various ideas on this subject. The former Leader of the Opposition, Mr Turnbull, the member for Wentworth, suggested banning donations above $1,000 and substituting public funding as the main source of campaign funds for political parties. He gained some support, particularly in the Sydney media, for this idea. I opposed the idea then and I still oppose it. Taxpayers already spend something like $50 million at election time to pay for the election activities of the major political parties—the Greens, the Liberal and National parties and the Labor Party. To publicly fund political parties would probably cost 10 times that amount if we were to fund political parties over a three-year election cycle. I have the tables worked out by the Parliamentary Library explaining what political parties cost during this year from the electoral returns. This is no surmise or suggestion from Mr Danby, the member for Melbourne Ports, without any firm background to it. The libraries’ sifting of the AEC’s receipts show that the operation of political parties cost $500 million. The taxpayers of Australia have to ask the question: do they want to spend such money on hospitals, defence and education, or do they want to spend $500 million on funding political parties during a three-year electoral cycle?

I think the current mix of private, union and some public funding is a much more equitable formula for the people of Australia. A scheme to make political parties funded by the taxpayer would rob our democracy of one of its most important elements: the support by citizens of the party of their choice. Political parties are supposed to reflect the views and needs of their supporters. If a party cannot persuade its supporters to donate money to it, it does not deserve to survive. It certainly does not deserve to be placed on life support in the form of taxpayers’ money.
Ideas of this kind arise from the belief that campaign donations breed political corruption, since people assume that donors are buying political favours with their money. I think this is a false notion, and therefore I reject drastic changes such as banning political donations to fix what I think is a greatly exaggerated problem. There is little evidence of serious corruption in Australian politics and almost none at the federal level. There is an excellent organisation called Transparency International, which publishes an annual index of corruption rating every country in the world by degree of corruption. In its 2009 index, out of 180 countries surveyed, Australia ranked eighth—in other words, we were assessed as one of the least corrupt countries in the world, ahead of the US, the UK, Germany, France and Japan.

Where there are suspicions of corrupt influence in the funding of political parties the correct cure is disclosure. As many doctors will tell you, sunlight is the best disinfectant, and this is true of politics as well as medicine. Making all donations above a certain minimum publicly known is the best way to prevent influence buying. This is why those opposite, instead of proposing draconian and unnecessary solutions such as banning donations, particularly from unions, which seems to be their obsession, should stop blocking the proposal in the Senate for campaign donation disclosure. Time is running out for this bill to be passed in time to have an effect on this year’s election. I urge the new Leader of the Opposition to pass it without further delay.

Recently published figures on political donations show one startling fact about the donations issue. The Citizens Electoral Council, a fringe political organisation, received donations of $1.8 million in the last year. This is a very large sum for an organisation that gets virtually no support as measured by votes in the elections. We know that the CEC’s godfather in the United States, Lyndon LaRouche, has a criminal record for swindling particularly elderly people via credit card fraud and in fact was jailed by the United States government after an FBI investigation that convicted him of what they call in the United States ‘interstate mail fraud’.

I have called many times for the CEC to be investigated by the Electoral Commission and the AFP, and I intend taking this issue up with the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. I believe the same process is happening here in Australia. The bunker in Coburg has a bank of telephones. Those poor, deranged people sit there cold-calling elderly people all over Australia. Once they get their credit card details, they then ring them back and half-convince them to take more money out. When you see the electoral returns of some ordinary people, all around Australia, it is extraordinary—they are giving $25,000 or $50,000 to this completely fringe political organisation—and I think the AFP should investigate.

Turning to the issue of foreign affairs, this week saw Ukraine’s fifth presidential election since declaring independence from the Soviet Union. Australians became briefly aware of Ukraine during the protests and other actions that became known as the Orange Revolution, which took place in the aftermath of their 2004 presidential elections. The protests were prompted by reports of several domestic and foreign election monitors as well as a widespread public perception that the results of the run-off vote between the two leading candidates, Viktor Yuschenko and Viktor Yanukovych, were rigged by the authorities in favour of the latter.

The nationwide protests succeeded when the results of the original run-off were annulled and the revote was ordered by the Supreme Court of Ukraine on 26 December 2004. Under
intense scrutiny by domestic and international observers, the second run-off was declared to be free and fair. The results showed clear victory for Yushchenko, who received 52 per cent of the vote compared to Yanukovych’s 44 per cent.

Although the results are not final, democracy seems to be established in Ukraine. It now appears that all the controversy and misplaced hopes for the Orange Revolution have seen Viktor Yanukovych, the loser at the last election, win this election. I must say I have to join many people in expressing disappointment with the former president of Ukraine. The decision just before his political demise to award the Nazi puppet and stooge Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine really reflects very, very poorly on him. I think that right across the world people are shaking their heads and wondering what happened to the prospects of the Orange Revolution under Viktor Yushchenko.

This part of eastern Europe is an important issue for Australia in an important way that I do not think people understand. Ukraine is, after all, a country of 50 million people. Ukraine is the largest country in terms of both population and geography in Eastern Europe. It is the second largest country that was part of the former Soviet Union. Its GDP is nearly $350 billion. There are around 15,000 Ukrainian Australians. Perhaps one of the reasons why there is so little interest in Ukraine is that there is no Australian embassy in its capital, Kiev. Australia has embassies in many countries which are arguably far less important in global terms and far less important to Australia than Ukraine—Malta, Ghana, Mauritius, Kiribati, the Holy See and Ramallah, just to name a few. Hopefully we will see this change in coming years.

On 28 January I was very pleased to see that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had a meeting with the Ukrainian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr P Poroshenko. I am told that the main focus of the talks was renewing the diplomatic and consular presence of Australia in Ukraine. After all, the Ukrainians have an embassy here in Canberra. I am told the foreign minister has indicated he will appoint, at the nearest possible time, at least an honorary consul in Kiev with the authority to issue visas. Mr Poroshenko apparently lobbied hard for full-fledged diplomatic representation of Australia in Ukraine. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade position is not yet public but I, for one, will be strongly supporting that. It is ridiculous that in that country full of mining engineers, excellent universities and high-grade technical education, where people should be of great interest to Australia, people cannot get a visa in Kiev. In order to even acquire a tourist visa to Australia, Ukrainians have to apply for a visa to go to Moscow and then, only when they are there, apply for another visa to come to Australia. It is very convoluted. That system could be obviated by an Australian embassy in Kiev, which would much more naturally serve Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia and, of course, the important country of Ukraine with 50 million people.

On another issue of international affairs, the announcement of the International Criminal Court that it was pursuing new charges of genocide against Sudan’s President Bashir brings the situation of Darfur back into the limelight. This catastrophe of two million internally displaced Darfuris, many of whom survive only on handouts from the few aid agencies left there, should be sharply in people’s focus. The upcoming Sudanese elections in April, pundits predict, will be fraudulent. Now more than ever is the time to focus on the situation. Last year’s expulsion of aid agencies by the Sudanese government, following the charges of President Bashir, worsened the situation as to the food, water and medicine available to the 4.7 million affected people in the western region of Sudan. On 21 January Sudan revoked the licences of
26 aid agencies in Darfur. As a consequence, little aid has been reaching the impoverished, the sick and, more importantly, the children of Darfur.

I have spoken previously in this House about the disgraceful increase in gender based violence, particularly against women in the west from Darfur, by the Janjaweed and other Sudanese government sponsored militias. The UN World Food Program estimates that it will need to feed 11 million displaced people in the various regions of Sudan this year alone. A peacekeeping force set up to protect the civilians of Darfur, UNAMID, has repeatedly stated that there is a severe lack of food and water for the population. Ninety per cent of the population of Sudan lives on less than $1 a day. One in seven children dies before the age of five, primarily from preventable diseases like malaria and diarrhoea. One in seven women who become pregnant is likely to die from pregnancy related causes. Only 6.4 per cent of the population has access to sanitation facilities, and an estimated 85 per cent of the population is illiterate. This is an indictment of the regime in Khartoum.

It is pleasing to see that Australia has, following continued pressure from this parliament, some military presence with the international forces authorised by the United Nations in Sudan. Unfortunately, because of the international situation and the concentration on Iraq and Afghanistan, the ability of the mainly African forces to transport themselves around to emergency situations is almost zero. The request for Western countries to provide helicopters so that the mainly African soldiery of UNAMID can be ferried immediately to points of transgression by the Janjaweed militia against the innocent people of Darfur has not been acceded to. The United Nations seems completely incapable of affecting the regime in Sudan.

In my last few minutes, I want to turn to the issue of migration and this government’s wise programs. I am very supportive of the current Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, and the government’s program of skilled migration. I think that his tweaking of the categories is a natural progression for the government as it continues to refine our immigration process. I was very pleased to hear the Deputy Prime Minister and the minister for immigration arguing for the economic as well as cultural benefits of our skilled migration program.

I want to go on the record here to just remind people—including people like Mr Dick Smith, who argues in the Daily Telegraph today against the ability of this country to grow and prosper—of an optimistic and positive view of migration. The 2008-09 immigration figures show that the net tax benefit, after paying for the humanitarian program and for family reunion, was $830 million in the first year. In the 20th year, that level of immigration brings a benefit to the Australian people of $1,760 million. This is in uncontested, unchallenged modelling from Access Economics which is in the budget papers and available from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. If you look at just that one year of immigration, over a 20-year cycle there are benefits of $20 billion plus.

Of course, when you look at the population bulge that Australia has with people my age and older—the baby boomers who are going into retirement and leaving their working lives—one of the sensible ways for Australia to provide for this is by continuing to have an intelligently based moderate, balanced immigration program. We bring primarily skilled people into this country—doctors, nurses, engineers et cetera—who will have the above positive economic effect.
A dear friend I saw last night at dinner, former minister for the arts Barry Cohen, for whom I used to work, had a very combative argument in the *Australian* on population. He said he had first raised this issue in 1970, when Australia’s population was 12 million. Today it is 22 million, and I cannot see Australia collapsing. Most Australians enjoy a standard of living and quality of life that are the envy of the world and a great improvement on the way we lived all those years ago. In my view, the 6.9 million Australians who have come to Australia since 1945 have made a great contribution to this country. They have supported our democratic norms, invigorated our culture and made an economic contribution as well.

Naturally we have to integrate planning in our cities for sustained water, transport and all the kinds of facilities that we now enjoy. I point to examples. In Perth, the Kwinana–city suburban railway is carrying seven times the traffic that was originally envisaged. The problems that are envisaged in Melbourne growing to seven million people are being catered for by the Victorian government, with many transport innovations and many water innovations, including the desalination plant. Much of the pessimistic world view of Australia—with Bob Carr and Dick Smith—is a very Sydney-centric view. It is to do with problems that exist in that city. I am much more optimistic, and I think the current Australian government has a much more constructive view— *(Time expired)*

Mr SYMON (Deakin) *(10.40 am)*—I rise to speak in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. These bills seek appropriation authority from parliament for additional expenditure of money from the Consolidated Revenue Fund in order to meet requirements that have arisen since the budget. They add up to around $2 billion. The funds will be directed towards important nation-building programs that will create jobs and help deliver a low-carbon economy. These include additional funds for the Solar Homes and Communities Plan and other energy efficiency measures for householders. The 2009-10 budget firmly concentrates on nation building, and by investing in infrastructure such as roads, education and community infrastructure this budget has helped to create jobs and build more efficient infrastructure.

A particular nation-building project that has recently been completed in my electorate of Deakin is something that I am immensely proud of—that is, the grade separation of Springvale Road. Although there are still a few minor works to go, the major parts are done and the traffic jams are over. It was on 11 January this year that the new underground Nunawading railway station was officially reopened, with traffic resuming on Springvale Road a few days before. This included, for the first time, the complete removal of boom gates and the railway level crossing that had existed since 1882. In recent decades of course this crossing has been consistently congested. Traffic has been delayed. It has created a nightmare not only for drivers but for residents of Nunawading and anyone who has had any need to go across or through the suburb.

At the time of the 2007 election the Australian Labor Party made a commitment to the people of Deakin. We committed to do something about Springvale Road—not just to do something but a genuine commitment to allocate $80 million to the much needed project and to deliver this whilst working in cooperation with the Victorian state Labor government. Unlike the Liberal Party, who for 12 long years in government and many years prior promised to fix the problems at Springvale Road crossing in Nunawading and achieved nothing, this was a genuine commitment to get the job done and, as they say, the proof is now in the pudding. The
job has been done and it was done in only two years. Even more than that, the actual construc-
tion was completed in approximately six months.

The type of construction and the way it was carried out in particular would be of great in-
terest to many in this House because it has shown us a new way of performing grade separa-
tions in urban areas without shutting down railway services and road services for months on 
end. It has shown that, by working in an alliance configuration, all the jobs required to be 
done in a grade separation can actually be done concurrently or very nearby. For instance, it 
means that there are no overnight works for 12 or 18 months whilst rail tracks are lowered. It 
means that when it comes to noise issues there are lots of things that can be done differently 
so that local residents are not put out. That is what happened with Springvale Road.

This method was first trialled a few years ago on a project a couple of stations up the line at 
Middleborough Road. Although there were some problems with that, lessons were learnt 
along the way and the especially good thing is that they were applied to the Springvale Road 
project. That meant of course that the project ran very smoothly. It ran ahead of time, and that 
is a great thing. Many civil and construction projects do not run ahead of time. Sometimes 
they get caught up by delays that have nothing to do with how good the workers on the job 
may be but have to do with design or environmental issues. That was not the case with 
Springvale Road. What has been learnt from this project can be applied to the next job that is 
done in Melbourne or in another capital city—how things are done quicker, how they are done 
smarter and how they will save money for the governments of the future. That is a good thing.

A city like Melbourne has far too many level crossings. With more than four million people 
living in the city now, and with traffic volumes increasing every year, the number of level 
crossings has remained static for many years. While it used to be quite easy to get across parts 
of Melbourne, at certain times it is now becoming harder and harder because the city is grow-
ing bigger. Not only are there more cars on the road; more train services means that boom 
gates are down for far longer on all these level crossings.

The Springvale Road rail crossing in Nunawading was well known in Melbourne as the 
worst intersection in town and rated for at least two years by the RACV as Melbourne’s worst 
red spot—that is, the most congested. And the congestion was not just at peak times. This was 
a railway level crossing where you could have traffic jams on a Sunday afternoon—and this is 
on a six-lane road with three lanes each way. It was very common for traffic to bank up for 
half a kilometre or more. So there were many people—and it was not only local residents, 
because it is a main arterial road in the east of Melbourne—who regularly got caught on 
Springvale Road. The knock-on effect of something like that is not always considered. When 
a large road like that is blocked many people think: ‘Well, I don’t want to drive up there. It is 
too crowded. I’m going to drive somewhere else.’ So they start using local streets as rat runs 
or they go to minor roads which then get clogged. The problem affects much larger areas than 
the particular intersection or that particular suburb.

The problem had been going on for many, many years, as I was certainly aware. I have 
lived in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne all my life and as far back as I can remember, and 
for many years before that, there was lobbying for this project to be done—for the railway to 
be lowered and for the road to be put over the top. In fact, last year I visited a retirement vil-
lage on Springvale Road just down from the railway crossing where I spoke to a lady of 92 
who said to me that her father had been complaining about that railway crossing in 1945. I
really did not know that the problem had been going on for so long. I am sure that there was not as much road traffic then and that there were not as many trains but it sounds as if it has always been a problem.

But it is a great thing that the Rudd Labor government delivered on its commitment of $80 million to complete this project. It is especially pleasing to report to the House that the Victorian Labor government delivered $60 million to build and coordinate the project and that both governments have worked extremely cooperatively together. That has been a great thing. There has not been blame or finger-pointing. There has been communication, which is quite new for this type of project in the urban environment. Many times in the past federal governments would not touch these sorts of projects. But they are needed. They are needed to make our community a better place, to make it more efficient and to employ people. Slowly but surely, as I said, our suburbs have become clogged with traffic.

There is a sense of achievement for local residents, road and rail users and pedestrians who tried to cross Springvale Road. That sense of achievement is immense, also, for local businesses around the crossing whose customers could not get to them because the boom gates were always down or because the traffic was always banked up. It is no longer a toss of the coin as to whether you are going to be 20 minutes late to where you wanted to get to. There are no boom gates. When you drive smoothly past the new underground Nunawading railway station without having to halt and wait for those boom gates to come down yet again and watch as one or more trains go past in succession, that is a very good experience. In fact, you may not even notice you have gone over the railway line, which I suppose is the best measure of success for the project in total—if people do not even know it is there.

The road that is there now, beautifully done, with a fantastically smooth surface, runs over the top of a railway line that carries 218 trains every day—there are not as many on weekends—and those trains are full of people. There were quite often accidents at the level crossing, and 50 serious accidents in five years. When those accidents happened, not only the road but also the railway line was blocked for many hours at a time. Every time that happened it affected literally thousands of people.

As with the construction project I mentioned before, a lot of things were done differently, and a lot of that was project scheduling. How do we do things on a job like that and not put others out? It meant that the road had to be closed, but only for a few days in total. So, even when road closures were notified, often within half the time notified for closure the road would again be open because the work had been completed so quickly. Instead of having the road closed while the dirt was being dug out from underneath to make the tunnel for the train lines, a concrete structure was poured into place and the dirt was dug out from underneath the concrete while the traffic drove over the top. That meant that the road was open for an extra two or three weeks; again, a very good thing for the local people.

More than 50,000 vehicles a day no longer have to run the risk of being stuck in a traffic jam or being caught up in yet another accident. It was only on 29 July last year that the first pile hole out of 400 for the project was bored, which is not very long ago. I was there on that day when it was just the earth waiting to be dug out. Four hundred piles were done in record time. The concrete was poured and it was a very well-run project. I had the great honour, with the Victorian Minister for Roads and Ports, Tim Pallas, and the state member for Mitcham, Tony Robinson, on New Year’s morning, of all days, this year to remove the last boom gate.
Even though the road was closed at that time, it was opened not long after. Until that morning, in fact as we took away the last boom gate, the very last trains were still running across that level crossing.

As I said, working hand-in-hand with the state government gave the project a lot of advantages. It meant that, when it came to getting things done, there was not the usual logjam that you get on projects where one side blames the other. This project worked as a model for cooperation. The workers on site worked hours—I certainly cannot overstate this—which I know many of us, even though we work long hours, would probably blanch at. These were the people who did the overnight shifts and the weekends; these were the people who worked over the holidays and on public holidays when, quite frankly, most of the rest of us were at home relaxing and having a good time. It is that dedication and the professionalism of the work that I commend. Of course, the engineers and the project management staff also put in those hours. It was a great team effort all round and, certainly, it is a great pointer to things to come in that area.

I mentioned earlier taking away the boom gates with Tony Robinson. Tony Robinson, the state member for Mitcham, was a long-time advocate of getting this project done. Kirstie Marshall, in the adjoining state seat of Forest Hill, also did a lot of lobbying at the state level to get the project done. The project would not have happened without the great support of the Victorian Labor Premier, John Brumby, and the minister for roads, Tim Pallas. Both of them came many times to view works on the project. That showed the level of interest and also got the news out there that things were actually happening. As I said, the state government contributed $60 million to the project as part of the Victorian Transport Plan. They now have a long list of other, similar projects that they will get done over the coming years—that is, grade separations in urban areas.

I have not yet mentioned the wonderful new underground station in relation to the project. The old Nunawading station was an asbestos cement building that had been put up in the late 1950s. It was a very cold and uninviting place that was falling apart. The new station is underground. It is accessible by lift and stairs on both sides of Springvale Road. It is manned from the first train till the last. It has customer facilities. It even has a coffee shop. These are the sorts of things that are attractive to people and that make them feel like travelling by train. It is all very well to put the message out there that you must use public transport but it actually has to be a pleasant experience for people to want to come back. Using Nunawading station is a pleasant experience. It is an absolutely wonderful design and has been architecturally noted already, and I am sure it will be again.

With a project like this something else which is important is the impact on local employment. This project had about 200 full-time staff on the job, not only in the project management office but also working on the tools. The best thing about that was the money flowing into the local economy—from not only the workers who turned up each day and spent their money at the local shops and the local suppliers but also the local contractors who took out some of the smaller works packages on the job. One of the reasons the station was built so quickly is that it was not built on site; it was built off site. It was prefabricated at a factory in Deakin—at the other end of my electorate—and then brought down and lowered into place. That again saved a number of weeks if not months on the construction. Even more impor-
tantly, it kept local people in jobs last year when the global financial crisis was hitting the hardest.

The local businesses that are there now of course will also benefit greatly because Nunawading is not split into two—you can easily get from one side to the other and if you can see it then you can now get there, whereas only a month and a half ago you might have been able to see it but you would have had to wait a long time to get there as you waited for various trains and/or car traffic to clear. The completion of this project has, of course, been very popular in my local area. But it does concern me that if the Liberals had had their way then the project would never have been funded. I should add that the member for La Trobe was very complimentary when on Monday this week in this place he said:

… 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 …

I congratulate him on that. Of course, it took a federal Labor government to do this, because for 12 long years nothing happened under the Liberals when it came to urban transport—when it came to actually doing it rather than talking, making hot air and making empty promises. Of even greater concern to anyone involved in this and other similar projects was the Liberal and National Party coalition’s attempt on 1 June last year to strip the funding from the national land transport component of the Nation Building Program. It was the Nationals with the support of the Liberals who put up an amendment in the House of Representatives to strip that funding from the program. It would have cut all federal funding from the Springvale Road rail separation project—and not only Springvale Road but also another 40 projects across Australia worth more than $655 million, including $30 million for the Clyde Road project that I know the member for La Trobe is attached to.

So after years of neglect, inaction and a complete failure to do anything about Springvale Road, when the project is fully funded by a Labor partnership between federal and state governments, the Liberals attempted to scuttle the project by withdrawing nearly 60 per cent of that funding. Fortunately, though, this con was exposed by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government in the House on 1 June last year. Fortunately for the people in my electorate of Deakin and the many people who use Springvale Road and its level crossing, these appalling amendments did not pass the House. The Hansard shows the names of those who tried and failed to take this vital funding away. The Rudd Labor government understands local issues and the impact of fixing local problems.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 10.59 am to 11.38 am

Mr SYMON—I will pick up where I left off before the divisions in the chamber. I want to extend my congratulations to everyone involved in the grade separation of the Springvale Road project. Of course, work on Springvale Road is not the only thing that has been happening in my electorate as a result of budget decisions. There has been other fairly significant investment in the electorate, especially in my local schools. In the brief time I have left for this speech, I can only really say that the National School Pride Program projects which have gone to 40 schools in my electorate, involving funding of $6.125 million, have been warmly received by parents, teachers, principals and students. The funds have been put to such good use, especially in schools where they have ovals they have not been able to use for years on end because, as everyone in Melbourne knows, water is short and many ovals have died off.
What this funding has allowed a lot of schools to do is to put in ovals with special drought resistant grasses that maintain a surface and allow the kids of the school to get out at recess, at lunchtime and after school and play and have a healthy education experience instead of being kept inside all the time because there are no outdoor play areas. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (11.40 am)—It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. I would like to turn my attention to some of the commentary that has emerged from those on the other side, particularly since the election of the new Leader of the Opposition towards the end of last year. We have heard a fairly consistent theme coming forward from those on the other side, that this government, the Rudd government, is a do-nothing government. Frankly, nothing could be further from the truth. I find it ironic that the very issue of action, whether we do something or do nothing, happens to be a centrepiece of attack from those opposite at the very time that they are mounting a rearguard action against taking action on climate change. For those to come forward, to say, ‘You’ve failed to deliver your election commitments,’ but to do everything—fight tooth and nail—to block the delivery of those election commitments is absolute hypocrisy.

We are not a do-nothing government, far from it. We are a government that has achieved so much in such a short period of time. In fact, I would like to take the opportunity today to run through some of the achievements of the Rudd government in my electorate. Recently it was drawn to my attention, in fact by a member of the Liberal Party in my local community, that there is a website still active that is www.jackiekelly.net. This website continues to be active. It says Jackie Kelly MP (1996-2007) as if it speaks as some sort of political obituary for the time in the office that my predecessor spent. When I had a look at the list of achievements that are put forward on this one page, of what was purported to have been achieved in 11 years, I am prepared to come forward in this place and make a comparison of the things that the Rudd government has achieved for the members of my electorate, the people of Lindsay, in just over two years compared to what is purported to have been achieved over the entire 11 years of my predecessor.

I want to begin with one point—that is, the former member for Lindsay says one of her proudest moments was ensuring that the Badgerys Creek airport would not be built. It was not until this government took the decision just before Christmas to formally walk away from Badgerys Creek as an airport site that that decision had been taken by any government of the Commonwealth. It is fraudulent to suggest that that was not the case. So to hold up as the proudest moment, the proudest achievement, something that was not achieved and something that it took a Labor government, the Rudd Labor government, to do is simply fraudulent.

And just to expose how dishonest that particular comment is, I want to have a look at some comments that have been made recently in response to the Rudd government’s decision to abandon the Badgerys Creek airport site. So if you take on board what the former member for Lindsay says—that is, this issue was dealt with definitively by the previous government—then you would not think that you would still have spokespeople from those on the other side out there continuing to advocate the benefits of a Badgerys Creek airport site. But I see that on 17 December 2009 on radio station 2SM the shadow minister for transport and the Leader
of the National Party, the Hon. Warren Truss, said that it was disappointing that Badgerys Creek will no longer be the site for Sydney’s second airport. He said:

Now that’s disappointing because there was a detailed study done at the time and it—that is, Badgerys Creek—was the only practical site for a second airport in Sydney.

So even beyond the political existence of the former member for Lindsay, we have those on the other side continuing to stand by their commitment to an airport at Badgerys Creek. This is a government that has taken action, contrary to the suggestions from those on the other side, and delivered the final nail in the coffin of the Badgerys Creek airport. It took a Labor government—it took the Rudd Labor government—to do that. So I have dispatched the first and the proudest purported achievement of my predecessor.

I look at some of the other things that are listed as great achievements and I see ‘delivering a 900-hectare park on the ADI site’. It is true that the Howard government did deliver that outcome, after a several-year community led campaign against its original proposal, which was to allow housing on that site in areas that had been heritage listed by the Commonwealth. It was a community led campaign. The council, of which I was a member and the mayor for much of that period, led a concerted campaign to which finally, weeks before the 2001 election, the Howard government conceded; it ended up agreeing to do what was merely meeting their own obligations under the heritage legislation as it then existed.

The third of the proudest achievements is ‘securing $10 million in federal funding to upgrade Panthers Stadium’. I congratulate the former member for what was achieved there, and that is a legitimate commitment that stands as a part of her record. But I go on and see the other listed achievements, which include ‘$132.5 million to improve the Hawkesbury Nepean catchment’. Not a cent of that money was spent. It was an election commitment made in the dying days of my predecessor’s term in office. To claim it as something that was delivered is dishonest.

The list continues with ‘$169 million for Penrith City Council infrastructure’. I can only imagine that that is the financial assistance grants that were made, because there was never anything specific provided to the Penrith City Council by the Howard government—certainly not in the nine years that I was on the council. Next on the list is ‘$18 million for a medical school at UWS’. That was a great achievement for Western Sydney, after a community led campaign. That particular facility, as important as it is to Western Sydney, is located on the Campbelltown campus.

Next is ‘$4 million for capital works at Penrith High’. If I were to go through and list, school by school, the millions of dollars that the Rudd government has invested in our schools, I would not be able to do that within the 20 minutes allotted to me. Frankly, if after 11 years, on your list of about 10 achievements, you come up with $4 million that you gave to one school, that shows just what an absence of investment in schools there was from the former government.

The list goes on with ‘$4 million for an indoor sport facility at UWS Werrington’. What this document does not say is that that money was provided as compensation to ameliorate the impacts that the move towards voluntary student unionism was going to have on the Univer-
sity of Western Sydney. So it was not even a fresh injection of funds; it was compensation for a policy that had harmed the University of Western Sydney.

I could go on and reflect on the comments of my predecessor where she said that no-one in her electorate went to university or wanted to go to university, where she took on the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney and said that she would ‘cut her off at the knees’ and where she failed to stand up for our local community when it came to the funding cuts that the University of Western Sydney was dealt. But that is the record. It is not correctly reflected in that one-page website that now stands there.

I want to contrast this with what has been achieved by our government, the Rudd government. In education there has been an education revolution. We do not merely identify $4 million that we contributed to one school in 11 years; we can go through the many millions of dollars worth of investment in our local schools. I hear those on the other side suggest that the computers in schools commitment, the digital education revolution, is not being delivered. We said that we would move towards achieving a one-to-one computer-to-student ratio by 2011 for all students between years 9 and 12. It is going to happen, and we are already well and truly on our way to achieving that.

In my electorate alone, most of the schools that received funding received it in the first round, because, up until the digital education revolution implemented by this government, the schools had a ratio of one computer to eight or more students. That was the legacy that was left behind by the former government, and now they stand up—we can only imagine knowing the dishonesty behind their statements—and say, ‘You’re only at one to two.’ Well, we are at one to two and, in the same way as in two years we took it from one to eight or more to one to two, we will finish the job and deliver one to one. That will be the biggest contribution to delivering a digital education revolution in our schools.

Let us look at trades training centres. The former member for Lindsay spoke about trades training day after day for many years and delivered nothing. We have two significant investments in my local community. We have two trades training centres. One is for the government schools—the primary site being Kingswood High—and another one for the Catholic school cluster at McCarthy Catholic College, Emu Plains. These are great investments that will provide additional training opportunities to local students in their local community and, in doing so, assist us to take on the challenge of the skills shortage.

Then we have the Education Investment Fund. At the last budget we had $40 million for a Climate Change and Energy Research Centre at the University Western Sydney. It is not just about investing in our universities but about investing in those areas of study and research that are going to provide practical benefits to our community and indeed right across the globe into the future.

We also have the Better Universities Renewal Funding. Those opposite had left our universities in a state of neglect—and it is no wonder when my predecessor, the former member for Lindsay, said that no-one in her electorate wanted to go to university. That is a lie. I come to this place to stand up for those parents and those students who demand access to educational opportunity—whether it be in trades training centres or at universities. For someone who was elected to represent people to come into this place and to go around the community and suggest that people should be denied that opportunity was scandalous. In my view, that is a centrepiece of the true legacy that was left behind by the former government. As a result of the

MAIN COMMITTEE
Better Universities Renewal Funding, the University of Western Sydney received an additional $16 million.

We also have the My School website. We heard so many platitudes from those opposition about performance testing, transparency and accountability but, when push came to shove, they did nothing. You could accept that and you could move on—I would be happy to do that, but I am not going to do that when I come into this place and hear those on the other side get up and say that we are do-nothing government. They did nothing; we are doing something. It is a pretty simple equation, and the sooner they get their heads around that, the sooner we will have an honest debate about the future direction of this country.

Dr Jensen interjecting—

Mr BRADBURY—I hear the member for Tangney and his interjection. I remember hearing forlorn interjections of that sort from those now in the opposition when we were in opposition—trying to pretend that somehow if you say something often enough people will believe it. The Australian public is a little bit brighter than that. You should think about the points you make and ensure that they are points that actually do have some resonance with the Australian community.

Let us look at health. We have heard much about the appalling record of the now opposition leader when he was the health minister. If you want to stick your hand up for the top job in this country, people are going to have a look at your record—it is not unreasonable. And the member for Warringah’s record is woeful. Let us have a look at his time in managing what is one of the most significant portfolio areas. He cut a billion dollars from our public hospitals, he froze the number of GP training places and he ignored the need for more nurses, despite a shortage of 6,000 nurses across the country. So why should the Australian people believe that Mr Do-Nothing as the minister for health has all of a sudden become Mr Action Man who is going to do something?

Frankly, we have more runs on the board on health than those on the other side were able to clock up in 11 years. In my electorate there has been an almost $100 million investment in the redevelopment of the Nepean hospital. I read out the list of the finest achievements of my predecessor over 11 years, and I did not hear one item of investment in capital expenditure for the big hospital in our community. They just walked away and neglected our health system. We are making real investments. Not only have we committed $96 million towards redeveloping Nepean hospital; we have committed another $17 million towards developing a clinical research school, which will help ensure that we have the skills to deliver healthcare services in our community. So we see once again, inaction for 11 years and lots of action in the last two—and we will keep doing that into the future.

I want to speak about housing affordability. When the former government was in place, it was the states who were the evil ogres in the housing affordability debate. So what did they do about it? Nothing. They said the best thing you can do is manage the economy well—and they did, or so they tell us. And then, with interest rate rise after interest rate rise, housing started to become even less affordable. But it was all the states’ fault! Interest rate rises will happen on occasion. But when you go to an election and say you will keep interest rates at record lows—as they did in 2004—you are being deliberately dishonest. That sort of dishonesty comes back to bite you, and I think it did bite them at the last election. In my local community we have delivered $4 million to Delfin Lend Lease for a road upgrade which will de-
liver a discount of $20,000 on land sales for 250 homes in that release area. We have a national rental affordability scheme which has delivered 194 units of housing in the Lindsay electorate.

And then, of course, there was the abolition and repeal of Work Choices. Those on the other side were not prepared to go to the electorate and seek a mandate for Work Choices, but, after such a big win in the 2004 election, they realised they were never going to get another opportunity to foist such an unfair set of workplace laws on the Australian people. So they took that opportunity. They hurt a lot of people in the process, and it also brought about their own undoing in the end. The harsh reality is that they have not learnt from their mistakes. The Leader of the Opposition says: ‘It was just a marketing problem. We shouldn’t have called it “Work Choices”. If we’d called it something else, the Australian people wouldn’t have noticed.’ He says he is quite happy to consider bringing back those laws, so long as they call them something else. I think the Australian people are going to see straight through that one, so you are going to have to do a bit better on that front if you are going to present an alternative to the current government, which has delivered on the areas it said it would deliver on.

In the short time remaining, I would like to reflect upon the decisive action the government took in relation to responding to the external threat of the global financial crisis. It was not something we made any election commitment on, and it became a very big focus of the government’s activities throughout 2008 and 2009. At the end of the day, I have a very firm belief that the people in my community want to know that they have a government that is in charge so that when those external threats, those unexpected challenges, come forward, the government has the capacity to step up to the plate, seize the moment and take action to ensure security, particularly in a financial sense, as the government has done. Australia is the only advanced economy in the world not to have fallen into recession. That is the one inescapable fact that those on the other side do not know how to respond to. They do not want to talk about the economy. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition says he is bored by economics. Well, I would probably be bored by talking about an issue where the other side of politics was so dominant. I would want to talk about other issues. That dominance was never more clear or more starkly there to be seen by the Australian people than when those on the other side voted against the stimulus package.

I want to conclude by reflecting not only upon the inaction of those on the other side in voting against the stimulus package but also on the thought that the Leader of the Opposition—the man who now holds himself up as being fit to be the alternative leader of this nation—was not even in the chamber when we voted on the stimulus package. Newspaper reports at the time said he was with a couple of old colleagues, reminiscing and putting down a few bottles of wine in the parliamentary dining room. When the biggest challenge that faced the nation in the term of this government was to be confronted, the Leader of the Opposition was off having a quiet drink. (Time expired)

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (12.00 pm)—I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. These bills will provide funding to further the work of the Rudd government in a range of areas, including environmental programs, enhancements to the work of Centrelink, and further development of the infrastructure and stimulus programs throughout our communities—amongst other items. When the global financial crisis—or the GFC, as it is known—
threatened Australia’s economy, the government responded very quickly and decisively, stimulating the economy and doing everything possible to protect the employment base from the worst effects that the GFC was offering. These bills continue that work through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan. The government has drawn on the support of Australia’s state and local governments, businesses, unions and community organisations to work together to protect Australia and its people from the threat of a potential recession caused by the GFC.

The Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan progress report for December 2009 indicates that the plan has done what the Rudd government intended: to protect Australia in economic terms. The report indicates that Australia is now the third fastest growing economy of the 33 International Monetary Fund, or IMF, advanced economies. It tells us that we are one of three economies not to fall into technical recession and that also we have the lowest level of government debt—approximately 10 per cent of GDP. This compares with an average of around 93 per cent of gross domestic product, GDP, for major advanced economies.

Without the government’s plan, the report estimates that the Australian economy would have contracted and the unemployment rate may have risen to 8¼ per cent or more, meaning hundreds of thousands of Australians were at risk of losing their jobs. I do not like seeing anyone lose their employment, any more than any other of us does, but I realise, of course, that some people have had that happen to them through this period, and we are doing what we can, obviously, to support them through that. However, when we think about the alternative outcome, the predicted high numbers of jobs that could have been lost, this is still a very welcome outcome. The report also tells us that the economy would have contracted in each of the past four quarters, shrinking by two per cent over the past year. Treasury has estimated that unemployment is expected to peak at a point around 1½ per cent less than it would have done in the absence of the stimulus. Treasury estimates that, overall, the government’s stimulus, through its Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, will support around 200,000 jobs in itself. The avoidance of a recession is due to those early and decisive actions of this government, despite the opposition from the other side.

The government continues to work to protect Australia’s environment, particularly from the threat posed by the effect of carbon emissions on climate change. Its commitments in relation to carbon emissions reductions have been planned for and implemented from the very early days of the government taking office. The opposition, on the other hand, appears to be at sixes and sevens over this whole debate, and we continue to watch with a great deal of interest as they attempt to find a way out of the situation they have gotten themselves into. Coming up with a new plan—though I have to ask: is it a new plan?—that has no funding attached to it is, frankly, just not good enough. This is far too important a matter to be made a political plaything. The Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, announced in January this year that Australia will formally submit its existing 2020 target range for reducing emissions to the Copenhagen accord: five per cent unconditional, with up to 15 per cent and 25 per cent both conditional on the extent of action by others, as set out in May 2009. I believe that the increased use of renewable energy production and carbon emissions reduction technologies is essential to Australia playing its part in reducing the effects of climate change brought about by carbon emissions. Australia simply must be at the forefront of developing
and using technologies that reduce our carbon footprint and the impact that footprint has on Australia’s and the world’s environment.

The Australian government’s further investment in the Solar Credits Scheme of $580 million will assist more Australians to install renewable energy production technologies to produce energy not only for their own households and businesses but for Australia’s electrical production system. This increased use and production will inevitably encourage research, development and implementation of new renewable energy technologies which will not just bring environmental benefits but also contribute to Australia’s continued economic development and the generation of new industries’ employment prospects. The solar credits rebate program is working to utilise Australia’s abundance of sunlight and, in places, wind energy. The increased use by the wider Australian community of power generated by the sun and the wind is just one way that Australia can play its part in reducing carbon emissions. Assisting Australia’s electricity consumers to purchase the technologies that will allow them to generate their own power but still reduce their carbon emissions and then be able to sell it back to the electricity system will impact on climate change as well as assist householders to reduce their energy bills. The success of the uptake of this scheme shows not only that Australians want the government to take action on climate change but that Australians themselves are prepared to take action.

On another matter covered in these bills, the Rudd government’s response to the H1N1 virus pandemic continues to be world leading as it prepares Australia for any future outbreaks of the virus. While the impact of last year’s pandemic outbreak in Australia was, in the majority of cases, milder than anticipated, it was unfortunately severe in thousands of cases, including in the cases of many young people and people who had previously been thought not to have known contributing factors to influenza susceptibility. The Rudd government continues its proactive approach to preparing for the possibility of future outbreaks in Australia by providing a further $45.2 million in funding to ensure that Australia is able to effectively manage any future pandemics. Funding will go to the storage, compounding and distribution of antivirals and personal protective equipment; the production, processing and distribution of immunisation consent forms; and, importantly, an immunisation awareness campaign. The government focus is on ensuring that the H1N1 vaccine is available to protect all Australians and that Australians are aware of its availability and the need to vaccinate themselves and their families. The awareness campaign will also ensure that those most vulnerable to the virus—pregnant women, those who are chronically ill, Indigenous Australians and healthcare workers—are aware of the availability of the vaccine and the risks presented by the virus.

The government will also provide the Department of Health and Ageing with $26 million in capital funding in response to the H1N1 influenza virus pandemic to purchase H1N1 influenza vaccine and fund the associated clinical trials. Through this further funding, the government continues to deal proactively with the threat of the H1N1 virus. This proactive approach has been reinforced by Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jim Bishop, who recently reminded all Australians of the importance of being vaccinated against the H1N1 virus, as a second wave could be expected to hit Australia soon.

I am also pleased to see, in a related health and ageing issue, the flow of $12.4 million via the Department of Health and Ageing for the Zero Real Interest Loans program, which will enable capital funding to build and expand residential aged-care and respite facilities in areas
of high need. I know, from my own electorate, that there are a number of building constructions underway right now in the residential aged-care and respite world. But I also know that there are pockets around the country with very high levels of need, where this program could have an effect, and I am very pleased to see this money flowing through for that particular reason.

I would also like to use this opportunity this morning to acknowledge the dedication and commitment to service of people who work in Centrelink offices throughout Australia and in particular, if I may, those Centrelink officers who serve within my electorate. My staff and I have always had, and continue to have, a good working relationship with this raft of public servants. We all know in this place the number of times a constituent or family may need some particular advice or help in negotiating their way through Centrelink processes, and I have always appreciated the advice and guidance of these hardworking public servants.

The Rudd government is going to provide $12.4 million to reduce Centrelink’s use of paper based claim forms and correspondence by increasing the use of document scanning and enhancing systems. From 1 July this year, all forms received by Centrelink will be electronically scanned as close to the point of receipt as possible. The efficiency initiative will deliver substantial savings over the next four years as electronic form scanning reduces storage and transfer costs. It will also cut the demand for paper and allow for greater time efficiencies in decision making. As well, from 1 July, fortnightly income-reporting requirements will be able to be met over the internet or by telephone using voice recognition software. This will bring greater efficiencies in assessing job seeker entitlements. These initiatives again demonstrate not only the government’s commitment to providing better services for those Australians who need Centrelink assistance but its approach of delivering services to the Australian people through innovative and environmentally sustainable strategies.

I chair the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, which worked last year on the carers report. I know from the evidence we took from an enormous number of personal carers and people looking after family members in their own homes about the frustration, the delay and the difficulties that the outmoded methodology of Centrelink was causing them. I know that they are going to be very, very pleased to see these new initiatives come around, particularly the ability to report by telephone. I would like to think that some of these decisions come from the sorts of work that that committee and other committees do in this place. I know that we will be very happy to see that happen.

I would also like to take the opportunity briefly to talk about the initiatives through the stimulus program that I am seeing in schools in my electorate. Whether it be a small Catholic school, a public school or a private school of another kind, I have not seen one word of complaint from any of those school communities, teachers, principals or students about the sorts of improvements that they are seeing on their own school campuses as a result of the range of investments that this government is putting into our school communities. In fact, they are welcoming them. They see the sense in them. They understand the economic connection to them. They understand what that work is doing for our local employment base and small business economy. I am extremely pleased every time I have an opportunity—it happens often, and I am very pleased about that—to see the outcome or the planning that is underway in all of these school communities. It is a really good thing.
At the other end of the scale when we talk about the education revolution is the ANU. The Australian National University, here in Canberra, has also, through the budget of this government, seen a very large investment at the top research end in a variety of ways. I cannot go into them all here this morning, but I have talked about them before in this place. There is a very strong, sincere and worthwhile investment going on at both ends of our education system.

The other thing that I would like to talk about quickly is the My School website. I do not think my office has received one phone call of complaint about the My School website. In fact, the word going around my community is that the parents and the schools are very welcoming of the information and the detail on that site. I was particularly pleased, just a few days ago, to see the first announcement by the Minister for Education, the Deputy Prime Minister, of money going as a result of the information on that website to schools that need to have that investment made in them. That is why that website is there. That is why it is being done. It is not a name-and-shame process at all; it is a process of seeing where the use should be put and where the investment should go and then making it. To see the first tranche of money go through in that way is evidence of that. I know from my own community that we will be very pleased to be able to see how those schools that need improvement will in fact be able to access the program’s reach.

The last thing I want to talk about before winding up is another program of the government which I have also seen very strong evidence of, and that is within the housing area. Other members have talked about housing affordability and so on. What I want to talk about is the programs that have gone through to state and territory governments—in my case, a territory government—to allow the refurbishment of housing that would otherwise be called ‘no longer useful’. For welfare housing in the city of Canberra where there has been an old home desperately in need of refurbishment at a very basic level, the money has not been there to do that in an economically viable way. I have seen more than one tenant move back into an old welfare house which has been able to be refurbished on behalf of the federal government and be resumed as welfare housing. That is a very good thing too. It helps with the list of people who need to get into that sort of housing. It assists the small business economy in this town which is carrying out the work required. While I do not have the numbers at my fingertips, I know that it is making a dramatic difference in Canberra, in my electorate, to the availability of welfare housing. We all know how important that is.

I want to make an observation about the opposition. They continue to accuse us of setting targets and not meeting them: ‘You haven’t done enough computers. You haven’t done enough schools. You haven’t done enough.’ On the other hand, they accuse us at the same time of spending too much money. I do not really think they can have it both ways. We have a very sincere and strong program in education, housing and a range of other areas. All this investment in our people, our communities and our families, has a good, strong economic reason. I would like those opposite to think a bit about this before they start throwing around casual words and accusing us of either not doing anything or not doing enough when, in fact, our whole target is to lift the economy of this country, make it viable, longstanding and strong, ensure that we can handle any threat of a GFC or anything else coming our way and make sure that our individuals, families, schools and small businesses all prosper.
Australia has always been a country of generosity and of hope. We need, however, to ensure that people out there who try to enter Australia are treated humanely and with dignity. Within these appropriation bills the government is continuing to contribute to the international protection of refugees and ensuring that support services are available to meet their specific needs. To that end, the government is providing $63 million to meet the cost of increased irregular maritime arrivals, with a further $11.2 million proposed to expand the Christmas Island accommodation and capacity in response to increased irregular maritime arrivals. On that subject I also want to say to the opposition: please do not use short-term, cheap political labels when we talk about refugees and when we talk about things like the ‘push-pull factor’. Just cast your eyes around the globe on which we live and look at what is going on. Look at the numbers of people fleeing from desperate times and think carefully about why they may be seeking refuge. It is a question about which we all consciously need to think very seriously.

In my opinion, these two appropriation bills continue the government’s work on behalf of our whole community. The work is being undertaken in difficult and challenging global times. It is my pleasure to commend the bills to the House.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (12.17 pm)—At the outset I want to wish Stavros Michael the best on his 17th birthday, on behalf of his mother, the member for Calwell, who unfortunately did not get the opportunity to speak in this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. We are reminded daily about this government’s initiatives in overcoming the economic crisis. Last week, I had the opportunity to host a harbour cruise in Sydney for the President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, Premysl Sobotka. The former Czech ambassador now Minister for European Affairs in the Czech Republic, Juraj Chmiel, was also on the cruise. As we moved under the Sydney Harbour Bridge he noted (a) the magnificence of the structure and (b) his endeavours to trace a Czechoslovakian company then located in Melbourne which had provided the very necessary rivets for the bridge. I think the company still exists in the Czech Republic.

This is a reminder of initiatives, of infrastructure and of how governments should counter things such as the economic crisis. As we look around the country we can see realities from the Great Depression such as the Great Ocean Road, in Victoria, and the canals that go through our metropolitan areas, and we know of housing construction et cetera. We have heard comments such as those from the member for North Sydney in September. On 2 September, when Stephen Long and Su-Lin Ong commented about this government, Long said that, in Europe, they were talking about the ‘wonder down under’, about this country’s success in countering this crisis compared with most European and North American countries. When that article was written and covered on the ABC, the member for North Sydney said: And of course if you throw enough money at a problem, some of it will stick and it’s good. It’s good for Australia.

... ... ...

It is fantastic for Australia that we are showing good economic growth today. We welcome the news but now Mr Rudd has to pull back on the spending.

That was a bit of condescension, a bit of a pat on the back, but essentially undermining the very necessary actions of this government. Those actions were necessary, and we should now reflect on what might have happened. The opposition are running around the country, trying
to pretend that this was wasteful expenditure, that it was a meaningless, unnecessary expenditure of taxpayers' money, and that taxpayers will have debt for no purpose whatsoever. They are trying to put across a line that, now that the government has been fairly successful by international standards, it was not a crisis and there was no problem. We should remember what the alternative was. Even now, despite our success, I look at the latest unemployment figures for small market areas in my electorate of Reid. At the end of the September quarter, when the national figure was 5½ per cent, the figure in the Holroyd municipality was nine per cent; in Parramatta South, which I think includes the suburbs of Granville South, Guildford and Granville, the figure was 13.7 per cent; and in the Auburn municipality it was 11.4 per cent. These figures represent real people who are unemployed. If you look at the trend over that year, you will see that 2,400 people went on the unemployment list in those particular parts of Sydney in my electorate. That is real suffering for those people.

Every family in this country was affected by the Depression. My father left school at the age of 13, forced to work for his family. At that age, he laboured in asbestos, which eventually contributed to his death. My mother recalls, on her family farm, her constant aversion to rabbits. Some people came and asked permission of her father to shoot rabbits, and the next day they saw the skins of pet cats on the fence. The reality was that people walked around this country, they were compelled to work, separated from their families, and marriages were postponed. One of the great anti-eviction riots and demonstrations of the Depression occurred in the suburb of Guildford, where I grew up—Bolton Street, Guildford is a legendary incident. From my knowledge of history, the family of Australian fast bowler Jeff Thomson was involved in anti-eviction riots. These are the kinds of chronic problems that would have been faced by people if this government had not acted strongly. We now have better social welfare protection than we did in the Depression because of the actions of Labor governments over the decades.

But, as I say, what the opposition are trying to put across is that this action was unnecessary, that there was no need for action, that it was all a furphy. They would have us go back to the Depression, with 29 per cent unemployment. They would have us in the situation that exists in the United States, with unemployment at 10 per cent plus. It is a major success of this government. Everyone concedes that the continuing demand in China, with the Chinese government keeping the economy going by pumping money in, has helped Australia. Our dependence on raw materials is a blessing and a problem but, in this crisis, it no doubt helped. But, clearly, if this government had not acted, more people in my electorate and their families, other than those I have mentioned, would have been drastically affected.

When I go around my electorate I see that there is a very significant presence of Lebanese Maronite builders involved in the economy of the Parramatta region. Whilst many of them are personal friends of mine, they vote Liberal. But they say to me that their industry has been saved by government action. Whether it is in regard to measures by the housing minister, whether it is in the area of social housing and the attempt to overcome homelessness or whether it is the first home buyer scheme, they say that their chronically-challenged industry would have collapsed but for the activities of this government. This country has been more successful than the rest of the world. European leaders are saying, ‘We wish we had done the same thing.’ We have been commended by international economic institutions that are normally conservative about the expenditure of government money; they have commended this
government for its actions. Even in this economic climate we see in my electorate people whose businesses have collapsed, people who have run out on debts owed to other people, and we see the impact on the economy.

So I join with other government speakers in commending the government’s actions. Like them, when I go around my electorate I see major school construction. This is important socially because, unfortunately, a reality of life in the western world and, more particularly, in this country over the last two decades is the increased inequality in the government education system. Government schools have become more dependent on the local school community to raise funds. It is not the global budgeting of past decades. Each school is, in some sense, required to do more for itself. In areas such as mine—where we have seen a flight from government schools because of religious schools and because of the perception of those schools—it is more and more a crisis.

The government’s measures in relation to the construction of educational facilities are necessary from the point of view of keeping people in employment, making sure that local building companies survive and ensuring that electricians and their small businesses survive. But it is also very necessary socially. What have we seen from the opposition? We have seen quibbling about whether the Minister for Education, the Deputy Prime Minister of this country, will take responsibility for some trees being moved at Unley, in South Australia. We have heard them carry on about where a building is located at Abbotsford or Drummoyne, in Sydney. Next thing, they will be complaining about whether it should be green paint or brown paint on government buildings. We have had them complaining about whether the contractor from a particular small town in Victoria gets the local school contract or whether someone 30 kilometres away gets it. This is evasion; this is irresponsible; this is irrelevant to the major point. On social grounds, government schools and other schools are receiving funds—whether it be for new assembly halls, covered areas or new teaching opportunities. This would not have occurred without the stimulus. I can tell you that, without this funding, schools in areas such as mine are very much challenged. We have seen consistent negativism from the opposition; we have seen a pretence that these measures were unnecessary.

I want to note, as many people have done in this parliament, the irresponsibility of the current finance spokesman for the opposition, Senator Joyce. He has his corny, seemingly throw-away lines—which are obviously very well practised before the mirror for days on end—but this is not good enough, given the responsibility that he now has. He has been shown to be totally erroneous on very significant financial statistics. To him, a billion and a million are the same thing—there is no difference, apparently. He has the United States and Australia both on the verge of economic collapse. What level of responsibility is there in the opposition? I remember that, when they were in government, if anyone talked about the unemployment figure et cetera you were said to be undermining the national interest, unpatriotic or slagging off the country. But this character, who got paid off with a senior portfolio because he helped to undermine the previous leader, not only gets a plethora of statistics totally incorrect but also undermines the country’s interests when the international crisis is not over. We have seen the interest that has been shown in the last few weeks about Greece’s national debt. We know that, although things are improving in the United States, it is still very borderline for permanent recovery. And the opposition, which has historically prided itself on economic responsibility and financial management, puts such a person in this position! It is no good for the
Leader of the Opposition to simply not totally back him and hope that he might go in a reshufl-

e.

Dr Jensen—Thank you for acknowledging our sterling economic legacy.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON—No, I said that you have prided yourselves on your analysis of yourselves. America and the world are looking at the failure of the deregulation of the mar-

kets; we have seen what the world came to the brink of. The other reason that the opposition are concentrating on the question of government debt is to totally evade their own responsibil-

ity in regard to an international climate of deregulation, of let it rip, of basically having no concern about the level of income paid to brokers and bankers. That is the other reason why they have chosen this irresponsible line of conduct in regard to attacking major infrastructure projects. If we go around the country we see it in schools, we see it in major construction pro-

jects, we see it in regard to the economy as a whole.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms JA Saffin)—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. The honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (12.30 pm)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

Corporate Governance

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (12.30 pm)—I wish to outline my concern regarding the corpora-

tions amendment financial market supervision legislation tabled last Wednesday, 10 February 2010. The global economy has just seen a market driven wrecking ball put through its collective GDP and financial sectors. It comes as some surprise to me, then, that the government is rushing to reform a corporate regulator and hand it further supervisory roles.

The government’s plan for the Australian Stock Exchange to hand over regulatory respon-

sibilities to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission is an interesting move when you consider the past performance of the corporate regulator and add to it additional responsibilities. ASIC will replace the ASX as the day to day market operations regulator, upholding corporate legislation across all market venues. The government has asked for sub-

missions on the proposed amalgamations, and, while I am sure that many useful comments will be tabled as to how this transfer of responsibilities can enhance our market regulation and increase competition, I am more interested in how two organisations, one private and one public, are going to collate seamlessly without creating a dereliction of duties. I know that both organisations currently have a good working relationship but, as they say, living together is harder than dating.

My submission is quite simply for more time and investigation to be put into these amend-

ments. Given ASIC’s past struggles to responsibly manage its own regulatory responsibilities, I call on the government to refer the corporations amendment to the relevant Senate commit-

tee for further discussion. This will ensure that any changes made to the regulatory framework do not erode investor confidence or business as usual market operations. While I am in favour of having the market regulated by a single corporate body, the sheer lack of credibility displayed by ASIC makes me think that we need to create both safeguards and minimum stan-
dards for the regulator to adhere to before we hand over the daily responsibility of our financial markets. Taking the time to get things right is of vital importance to the market. We survived the financial crisis because our prudential banking regulator did an excellent job maintaining confidence in the banking sector—a Howard government legacy. But ASIC does not have the same impressive track record as APRA. Thus, in-depth questioning through a Senate committee would allow the government to plan for all possible contingencies. It would also provide more time for external consultation, market input and stakeholder business.

Currently the government is looking at changing over the responsibilities in the third quarter of this year. With an election to be called in roughly the same time frame, I can only imagine the government will try to rush this legislation through before the election is called. Again, I urge caution. Remember, this is the same ASIC which oversaw the collapse of One.Tel, Westpoint and HIH, to name a few. It is not often that you hear ‘ASIC’ and ‘market confidence’ in the same sentence. High profile cases like those mentioned erode the market’s confidence in an organisation that has too many law graduates and not enough real market experience.

I also urge the government to consider the recommendations and concerns of the ASX itself. The ASX has raised concerns in its submission about the transitional arrangements at the time of transfer. This includes the potential breach and enforcement matters which may be compromised because of the transfer. The aim of this merger should be to bring about regulatory cohesion, but with the potential for a new carbon credit market to come on line and projected growth in the resources and commodity markets it is imperative that ASIC is prepared not only for changes but for rapid growth. This legislation has been in the pipeline for a number of years and the marketplace has resigned itself to the knowledge that a competent regulator, the ASX, will no longer be in charge. The market is looking for the government to provide a strong sign that these changes are well thought through and will be in the best interests of the market and its stability. I ask for caution by the government in moving forward its merger plans and strongly urge it to move the amendments to a Senate committee for further discussion.

Archives

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (12.36 pm)—This week I spoke in the debate on private members’ business on the motion regarding the retention of archives in their respective states. I was making a case for the materials to be taken over by the state archives, especially in Tasmania, where it is still a relevant matter. I would like to expand on the reason I believe it is so important to keep collections of information together and in areas where it was generated. Our history and heritage is beginning to become more and more important to us in the development of our nation. Certain records such as those of migration and settlement give us a direction on where each state developed from. In my own state of Tasmania, Indigenous settlement shaped the countryside for thousands of years, so that when European settlement first came there was already a settlement history. The walking paths of the Tasmanian Aboriginals where they came from the highlands down to the coast were well established and well worn over thousands and thousands of years. The Launceston to Hobart Heritage Highway crosses one of those major paths, which were much more ancient and should be recognised sometime, hopefully, in the future. That settlement history has been overlaid by new settlements since we began.
Much of the information on exploration and archaeology has been stored in collections, and early records went into the archives. So it comes down to being able to help people discover their past, see where changes over time were made and benefit from this early knowledge of the natural watercourses and railway line planning—where they thought they might have put the railway, where the railway now runs and maybe where it will go into the future.

Maritime activities are very important for my home state of Tasmania because we are surrounded by water and we have a very rich maritime history. The early architecture, especially to aid conservation of buildings now, when people are starting to become aware of keeping our buildings in good order and putting them back to maybe what they were, is so important. The needs for access and easy access are very important to get to these records. Tasmania has more heritage buildings still left in original condition than any other place in Australia, and of course we are the smallest state, with half a million people, so for us to get heritage money to find a way to keep that heritage intact and to help people in a private sense to be able to keep their houses and restore buildings is a very important challenge for us.

Our stone building heritage is quite unique. We have whole towns—like Oatlands, Richmond and Kempton—where the buildings are still really intact and, apart from probably a lick of paint and a few new beams, are basically unchanged from the early buildings that were erected. This is pretty unique stuff, and we need to find ways to keep it. But ensuring that they keep their integrity as heritage buildings is very expensive. We will need to find ways through that so that a public interest can be found. The owners of these buildings are really left to preserve them in any way they can. There are a few small grants and some local government assistance but little else. Having to start travelling the country looking for additional plans and documents to try to keep a true record does start making this an almost impossible job for those who are dedicated to it.

Those who have visited Tasmania cannot believe that we have so much here, and a few locals are really interested and struggle to keep the experience real. While we are famed for our fine food, our fruit, our fish, our fresh vegetables and wine and other boutique alcohol, the settings in which they are delivered are often hard pushed to keep their buildings upright. Our heritage can also provide a source of old/new jobs, and training to develop those old skills should be included as part of our education system so that—(Time expired)

Indigenous Welfare

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (12.41 pm)—I have just come from the House of Representatives, where the Prime Minister has made an announcement on Indigenous welfare across Australia. If he can deliver what he has outlined, he will have my 100 per cent support and the support of my party. He outlined some good ideas that were well received by the parliament. We often get asked by the broader community, ‘Why don’t you people get up there and sit down together and nut something out and try to make it work together on behalf of this nation?’ I think that the Prime Minister’s statement today with regard to Indigenous communities will be fully supported by members of this House.

I was driving to Warragul to my office the other day and on the side of the road there was a car and trailer—a pretty rough car and a pretty rough old trailer—and three young fellas, a heap of insulation and a ladder. I think that the program that the government set out to achieve with regard to insulation was important. But, in the last couple of months, my office has been inundated with complaints, especially from older residents, about the aggressive nature of
people trying to sell them insulation—for example, telling them it is for free; telling them that the insulation they have is carcinogenic but not even going into the roof and checking what they have; and trying to back up onto their lawns and throw insulation in the place. These three people I saw on the side of the road trying to tie their insulation back onto the trailer did not have any sort of work uniform on or an indication of who they were. The government has to look at that program very carefully.

It is the same with the Green Loans Program. Those receiving the loans are complaining. Those who were trained to give the loans are complaining. We do not get those sorts of complaints to my office unless there is an issue. The government needs to address this—Minister Peter Garrett needs to address this straightaway.

It is similar to the changes that the government decided to make to Landcare. Landcare was such a fantastic program and it was working well and achieving all the goals. Bureaucrats get involved and say, ‘There’s a new government; we can do it a new and better way,’ but often the old way is the best way when we are delivering the planting of trees. Every member of this House has a Landcare group somewhere that they are very proud of. Those groups are proud of the work that they have done and they show you the years of work they have done—‘Look at what we’ve done. See how our area has changed. See how salinity has been dealt with.’ It is just amazing work, and I want to commend everybody who is involved with that.

I have just been to a minister’s office—I will not name the minister—and I got a great reception from a young lady there. I said, ‘Here’s the plight of a person with regard to the youth allowance and how it has affected him and his family.’ I think the government could intervene in this case to help this young person through to their goal. The young lady not only received my letter but said, ‘I think I can do something here.’ As members of parliament, what we often forget are the small things that we are able to do just through a reasonable approach to a minister or to a member of their staff. Often that minister will not even know what has gone on in the office and that one of his staff may have said, ‘Yes, I think I can help you.’ It was not about me; it was about this young person.

As members of parliament, we are not going to remember where we got to on the ladder or what we did throughout our parliamentary careers. We are going to remember those individuals whose lives we have been able to make a difference to. The important memories for members in this place in the future will be who we helped, what individuals’ lives we changed, not how we self-aggrandised. With the Prime Minister’s statement today, I hope that this government, with our support, will be able to make a difference to many Indigenous lives.

**Redhead Gardens Palliative Care**

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.46 pm)—I would like to associate myself with the words of the previous speaker. At the end of the day, a member of parliament needs to look at what they have done to help people and what difference they have made in the lives of individuals. The self-aggrandising approach to politics is not one that I endorse. Rather, I endorse the approach of trying to make a difference in the lives of real people each and every day. If, at the end of the day, as a member of parliament you can walk away from this place and feel that you have done that, I think then you have achieved your goal.

I would like to talk about an aged care facility, Redhead Gardens in Redhead, that is making a difference in the lives of their residents. On 29 January I attended a presentation in
which they were awarded a better practice in aged care award by the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency. It was one of six awards that were given to aged care facilities in New South Wales. This was an outstanding achievement by the group. They received this award because within the facility they set up a palliative care program which is an extension of ageing in place. Low care, high care and palliative care is available.

A palliative care committee was set up at Redhead Gardens, which set about organising the kind of approach that would develop the care that is given within that facility to a new level. Under this palliative care approach, residents are able to determine their end-of-life choices. There are conferences to discuss issues with the families. A palliative approach committee meets regularly and reports back to the advisory committee within the aged care facility. A room is set aside and made comfortable for family and friends who wish to stay during the end stage of the life of a resident. Sympathy cards are sent to the families of residents who have died and memorial services are held every six months to remember the residents. A supply box has been established to ensure quick and easy access to equipment when it is needed. Staff education is involved in the palliative care process, which has meant the appointment of a clinical nurse to oversee the program. That it is something that the facility can be very proud of.

Even in an aged-care facility, death is not something that people feel particularly comfortable with. It reminds residents of their own vulnerability. For the families that have their loved ones in those facilities it is a very difficult time. As I mentioned, there is a clinical nurse specialist, who is the cornerstone of the program that is run through the facilities. It is very important that the staff and the residents of this facility are involved in this program. It is an inclusive program which includes the families and where everyone is valued. Redhead Gardens can be held up as a model, and I congratulate them on their achievement.

I also would like to congratulate the Whiddon group on their very innovative approach of appointing a person who oversees special programs and plans for residents that are suffering from dementia and behaviour problems. They are outstanding, they are a leader in the field and they should be congratulated in every way.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (12.51 pm)—I would like to share with the House an exciting initiative launched by a constituent in my electorate. It has come to my attention that Darcy Moore and his family, including his daughters Sarah, who is three, and Lucy, who is six, have drawn on recent technological tools to promote a beautiful local attraction. The Kiama Coast Walk is a route etched out between Kiama Heights and Gerringong, or more specifically Loves Bay and Werri Lagoon. Mr Moore has engaged the online image-sharing service Flickr to promote the walk, putting up incredible photos from his own camera and inviting others to display theirs for all to see. I truly am so impressed with the Moore family’s initiative.

I had the privilege of walking the track when it first opened and can testify to the magnificence of the scenery. The Kiama Coast Walk is a prime example of what our local region has to offer for tourism. When you walk along this track you can be forgiven for thinking at times that you really are walking back in time. As shadow parliamentary secretary for tourism, I recognise how important grassroots local campaigns like this one can be in attracting tourism to regional areas. It just goes to show how online social media tools, such as Flickr, Facebook and even Twitter, can help everyone engage in tourism and get their views across. Mr Moore
was quoted in the *Kiama Independent* as stating that tourism operators who are not using social media tools are missing out on the prime media of current times. I also believe this to be true, which is why I try to make time to tweet, write and post on online forums and use Facebook. I also find that it allows me to communicate with the younger generation I represent in this House.

Social media has become an almost essential tool, not only for individuals but for community groups, businesses and the entire region. In this case it allows Kiama, as a destination, to reach out both nationally and internationally, showing that the South Coast really is open for business. I encourage all other local residents’ groups and businesses to get involved and help showcase our beautiful region to the world. Of course, we all know that marketing alone will not do the job. We need something that people want and a way to cater for their needs before we can start any form of promotion. At this point I am specifically referring to Jervis Bay, a part of the South Coast that has all the right ingredients but not all the necessary infrastructure to cater for would-be tourists.

Just after Christmas, the luxury ocean liner *The World* paid a visit to Jervis Bay. It moored in the middle of the bay and transported the visitors by small boats to the nearby coastal village of Huskisson. It stayed for just one day. Just before Christmas day I read in the *Daily Telegraph* that a cruise ship wanted to visit Christmas Island, the current residency of quite a growing number of detained asylum seekers. The point is that they have the comprehensive harbour to cater for tourists that Jervis Bay does not. The Attorney-General’s website on the topic of Christmas Island says:

> Christmas Island welcomes visiting yachts and provides moorings, water and bathroom facilities at Flying Fish Cove.

That translates into real cash for the local economy, yet the state government have vigorously resisted entertaining the notion of allowing a decent harbour to be built in Jervis Bay. The fact remains that tourism in Australia has been in decline and projections suggest that it will continue to do so without new initiatives.

For the sake of the regional and rural economies that rely on the tourist dollar, we need to encourage overseas visitors to go further afield. There is a huge opportunity here and, once the secret of Jervis Bay’s breathtaking beauty got out, marketing would be no problem. I call on the government to quit wasting money on campaigns that do not work, such as the failed No Leave, No Life campaign, which saw more Australians travel overseas than domestically. They need to start investing in the infrastructure that people want in rural and regional areas and use the tools they have before them to ensure the ongoing viability of the tourism industry.

**Fishing**

*[Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (12.55 pm)—]* Recently, as the result of international obligations mandated by our environmental responsibilities an impasse occurred affecting recreational fishers with regard to shortfin mako sharks and porbeagle sharks. Essentially, it arose out of a legislative requirement under the Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act in Australia that makes it mandatory to list species that are listed under the Convention on Migratory Species. A species that is deemed and listed to be threatened under the international Convention on Migratory Species is automatically listed under our EPBC Act in Australia. That affected the shortfin mako shark, in particular. Recreational fishers and others
engaged in this recreational activity were upset and confused, and, without the right explanatory information, correctly so.

We immediately had a number of members of parliament contact the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, and his department, to seek clarification on this. The department and the minister clearly and quickly responded to the situation by at least setting out what the obligations were by law in this situation. The minister gave a commitment that he would immediately investigate it, and he has, along with his department.

Unfortunately, there were some who mischievously used this situation for political points. I found it rather ironical that some of those people, such as Senator Colbeck in my electorate, were part and parcel of a government who passed the legislation which made this mandatory, but they never pointed that out. I thought they made a political situation out of a confusing situation where we have a mandatory legal obligation to follow our own legislation.

The minister gave an assurance that he would act on this. He also issued a recommendation that he did not see an issue with catching and releasing mako sharks for recreational purposes. The minister has now investigated the issue and he has set out that it is not so much a regulatory solution that we need here as a legislative one and, as I mentioned, the minister is as a matter of priority progressing a legislative solution. I want that on the record—to mitigate the impact on recreational fishers of the recent mandatory listings of mako and porbeagle sharks.

For the record, and particularly for Senator Colbeck to publicly acknowledge, it is intended that subject to completion and approval of all necessary legal documentation, a bill introducing the required legislative changes will be introduced into parliament during the next sitting week, which commences on Monday 22 February. It is the commitment of the minister: given and notwithstanding those conditions, to introduce the legislation as soon as possible.

We were bound by former legislation—introduced by those who are out there criticising publicly, like Senator Colbeck—and we honoured that and we are now setting out to change the legislation so that fishers are not disadvantaged for ‘catch and release’ or ‘catch and kill’. I congratulate the minister. I look forward to the legislation coming to the House as quickly as possible and to the support of those opposite, particularly those who so mischievously used this for their own political purposes, but never told the whole truth when they did it.

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 1.00 pm