House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 4, 2010
Thursday, 11 March 2010

FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH PERIOD

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SITTING DAYS—2010

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Officeholders
Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Mrs Margaret Ann May MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Mr Rowan Eric Ramsey MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz 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 Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

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## Members of the House of Representatives

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**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, Energy Efficiency and Water
Senator Hon. Penny Wong

Minister for Environment Protection, 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]
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs                                      Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women        Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Home Affairs                                        Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and    Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Regional Services Delivery                                        
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the     Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on      
Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Con-
sumer Affairs                                                  
Assistant Treasurer                                               Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Ageing                                               Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth      Hon. Kate Ellis MP
and Minister for Sport                                            
Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science and Minis-
ter Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Effi-
ciency                                                         Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Minister Assisting     Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
the Prime Minister for Government Service Delivery                
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional
Development and Local Government                                  Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary   Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Secretary for Water                                                
Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia       Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services
and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Recon-
struction                                                      Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assis-
tance                                                          Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary
Secretary for Trade                                               Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary
Secretary for Voluntary Sector                                    Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement
Services                                                        Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Employment                           Hon. Jason Clare MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Health                                Hon. Mark Butler MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry              Hon. Richard Marles MP
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 March 2010

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

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL AMENDMENT BILL 2010
PROTECTION OF THE SEA LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010
TRANS-TASMAN PROCEEDINGS BILL 2009
TRANS-TASMAN PROCEEDINGS (TRANSITIONAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2009

Referred to Main Committee

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

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

I indicate to all honourable members that this motion enjoys the support of the Chief Opposition Whip, the honourable member for Fairfax.

Question agreed to.

TRANSPORT SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (2010 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Albanese.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (9.02 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.


Background

Australia’s aviation security legislation framework consists of a number of layers of security measures, and is under constant review to ensure that Australia’s aviation industry is safeguarded and able to quickly adapt to new threats to security.

The Aviation Transport Security Act 2004 establishes a preventive security regime to safeguard against acts of terrorism and unlawful interference with the Australian aviation sector.

The failed terrorist attempt on Christmas Day last year against a United States-bound flight clearly demonstrates the continuing need for stringent preventive security measures.

Australia’s maritime industry is critical to the social and economic prosperity of Australia. Nearly 4,000 ships carry goods and commodities to and from Australian shores each year, carrying 99 per cent of Australia’s imports and exports by volume. These ships represent nearly 10 per cent of world seaborne trade by mass—the fifth largest shipping task in the world.

The Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Act 2003 establishes a preventive security regime to safeguard against acts of terrorism and unlawful interference with Australia’s ports, port facilities, ships and offshore facilities.

It gives effect to Australia’s international obligations as a contracting administration under the International Maritime Organisation’s International Ship and Port Facility Security Code, established under chapter 11-2 of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea.

To quote from the recently released counterterrorism white paper:
Terrorism continues to pose a serious security challenge to Australia. The threat of terrorism is real and enduring. It has become a persistent and permanent feature of Australia’s security environment.

Objective of the Bill

The Transport Security Legislation Amendment (2010 Measures No. 1) Bill 2010 contains two amendments to the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004. Both amendments have been developed to better equip the Australian government’s capacity to respond in the event of an aviation incident.

The second aviation security amendment will enable the secretary of my department to delegate all or any of his powers and functions to a senior executive service employee in the Attorney-General’s Department. While this amendment is administrative in nature, it is being made in preparation for the establishment of the ‘Commonwealth Incident Coordinator’ position within the Attorney-General’s Department from 1 July 2010. The creation of the position of the Commonwealth Incident Coordinator forms part of the Australian government’s all-hazards approach to crisis and consequence management.

Measures in the Bill

I will now describe the measures in the bill which amend the Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Act 2003. Firstly, the bill inserts provisions to allow ship operators to be given exemptions from certain security requirements in certain circumstances, where there is no impact on the security outcome.

From time to time, Australian ships that are not required to be security regulated under the act need to travel overseas or to an-
other Australian state or territory on an exceptional basis. These one-off voyages every five years or so are typically for maintenance purposes but mean that these ships must comply with all of the security obligations under the act, at a significant additional cost to their operations.

The amendment proposed in the bill would allow operators of Australian ships to apply to the secretary for an exemption from the requirement to hold an International Ship Security Certificate or a ship security plan. Such an exemption would only be granted in exceptional circumstances and if security in the maritime environment was not reduced. This amendment is consistent with that provided for in the Safety of Life at Sea, or SOLAS, convention, to which Australia is a signatory.

A similar situation exists for foreign flagged ships; they are occasionally granted an exemption by their flag state from complying with their requirement to hold an International Ship Security Certificate or its equivalent. Such an exemption is often granted to allow the ship to travel to Australia as part of a one-off overseas voyage to conduct maintenance on the ship, a similar situation to the one I just explained.

There is currently no ability under the act to recognise an exemption made by another contracting administration to the SOLAS convention, meaning that a foreign ship arriving in Australia without an International Ship Security Certificate is in contravention of the act. The proposed amendment would allow for regulations to be made prescribing certain kinds of regulated ships that are exempt from the requirement to have or obtain a valid ship security certificate on arrival in Australia.

Secondly, the bill makes amendments with regard to passenger ships to enable regulations to be made to define different classes of passenger ships and to enable screening officers to conduct frisk searches of passengers and crew.

Currently a ‘one size fits all’ approach is applied to passenger ship security regardless of the operational characteristics of the specific ship or class of ship. This approach does not allow individual factors, constraints and considerations to be taken into account when prescribing an appropriate and customised range of preventive security measures in relation to the level of threat for their operating environments.

This amendment would allow for the prescription of different classes of security regulated ships in the maritime security regulations. For example, this would allow passenger ships to be defined by any combination of size, passenger capacity, areas of geographical operation, type of items carried or the types of activities they conduct. It would allow for customised security measures to be developed and applied to each class, avoiding the issues attached to over- or under-regulation.

Passenger ship security will also be strengthened through the introduction of frisk search powers to enhance the screening and clearance of passengers and crew in certain circumstances. The establishment of frisk search powers for the passenger ship sector means that more effective security screening processes can be promptly introduced, should the nature and level of threat in the maritime environment suddenly escalate. The recent events of Christmas Day highlight the need to have a responsive security framework, adaptable to rapid changes in circumstances. The power to conduct frisk searches in certain circumstances already exists for aviation travellers and the proposed amendment would mirror these arrangements.
The bill will also provide greater flexibility to make regulations with regard to screening and clearing matters.

I propose to amend the act so that regulations can be made to address all necessary aspects of maritime security screening practices, and not be limited to the matters specified in that section.

Thirdly, the bill enables certain persons to be appointed as security assessment inspectors to conduct security assessments of maritime industry participants.

Currently the act does not have any explicit powers of entry into security regulated areas other than for departmental officers and law enforcement officers.

This amendment will enable the secretary to appoint a person as a security assessment inspector if that person meets criteria to be specified in regulations. Appointed security assessment inspectors will be able to survey the extant security environment at a regulated maritime site and examine the effectiveness of current security policies. This will enable timely responses to changing and emerging threats to be developed to ensure the regime continues to meet the threat of terrorism both now and into the future.

Fourthly, the bill provides for measures to allow the secretary of my department to delegate his powers under the MTOFSA, the Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Act 2003, to agency heads and certain SES officers in other agencies in certain circumstances.

Currently, the secretary of my department may delegate all or any of their powers and functions under the act to an SES employee in my department only. This amendment would allow the secretary to delegate all or any of their powers and functions to the agency head of an agency that conducts national security activities and an SES employee in the Attorney-General’s Department. In respect of delegations to agency heads, these may be subdelegated within the agency to an SES band three employee.

This amendment would also allow the secretary to delegate his or her powers and functions to the Commonwealth Incident Coordinator and mirrors the aviation security amendment I mentioned earlier.

The ability to delegate powers externally across the aviation, maritime and offshore environments provides my department with the maximum flexibility within the legislative framework to enable an appropriate incident response to be made in unexpected and often urgent situations.

Finally, the bill makes some minor amendments to modernise image recording powers for maritime security inspectors. To modernise the options for use of recording media and to align with the newly introduced powers of a Security Assessment Inspector, the bill replaces the power to photograph equipment with the power to make a still or moving image. To correct a drafting anomaly, the bill introduces a similar power to allow for the recording of images by maritime security inspectors when inspecting equipment at a place, vehicle or vessel under the control of a regulated maritime industry participant, to align with their existing power to photograph on board a security regulated ship and on an offshore facility.

**Conclusion**

Just as terrorists will continue to alter their methods, so too must we ensure that our preventive transport security arrangements evolve to meet this threat. The Transport Security Legislation Amendment (2010 Measures No. 1) Bill 2010 will enhance the operation of the aviation and maritime security regimes for the benefit of our maritime, offshore and aviation industries and the Australian public. I am confident that the measures introduced in this bill will contribute to a
transport system that is more secure against the threat of terrorism. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

The SPEAKER—Order! The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT BILL (No. 1) 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Brendan O’Connor.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs) (9.16 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Customs Tariff Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2010 contains three amendments to the Customs Tariff Act 1995.

Two of these amendments relate to import concessions for the textile, clothing and footwear industry. The amendments will insert end-dates for items 61 and 73 in schedule 4 of the Customs Tariff. These amendments reflect the government’s change of policy from providing assistance through tariff concessions to providing a wider range of support to TCF industries as set out in the government’s TCF innovation package as announced in the 2009-10 budget.

The bill amends item 61 to insert an end-date of 30 June 2010. Item 61 provides the means for duty concessions under the Expanded Overseas Assembly Provisions Scheme.

This scheme provides duty concessions for certain TCF goods that are manufactured overseas from Australian fabric and are subsequently imported back to Australia.

The bill amends the end-date of item 73, changing the existing end-date from 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2011. Item 73 gives effect to the Product Diversification Scheme for certain clothing and finished textiles.

While importers will no longer be able to earn duty credits for certain clothing and finished textiles and then to apply those credits, through item 73, to offset duty payable on qualifying imported finished products.

The bill also inserts an end-date of 31 December 2009 for item 53C in schedule 4 of the customs tariff. Item 53C provided a mechanism to reduce the general rate of customs duty from 10 per cent to five per cent for certain goods that were not of a kind used as components in passenger motor vehicles.

From 1 January 2010, the general rate of duty for the above goods reduced from 10 per cent to five per cent. As a consequence, there is no need for the item 53C concession...
and the item is redundant. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Coulton) adjourned.

The SPEAKER—Order! The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting

COMMITTEES
Public Works Committee
Reference
Dr KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water) (9.21 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Proposed fit-out of new leased premises for the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency at the New Acton Nishi Building, Edinburgh Avenue, Canberra City, ACT.

The Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency proposes to undertake a fit-out of new leased premises at the New Acton Nishi Building, Edinburgh Avenue, Canberra City, ACT, at an estimated cost of $20.5 million plus GST. The DCCEE currently occupies offices at 2 Constitution Avenue and 20 Allara Street, Canberra City, ACT. The existing leases will expire on 31 December 2012 and 14 June 2011, respectively. The existing fit-outs at these locations are in poor condition—in most cases more than 20 years old—are not related to the DCCEE’s organisational and operational needs and are not capable of economical refurbishment to modern standards. As a result of the recently announced machinery of government changes, the DCCEE also has staff currently accommodated in the Parliamentary Triangle, Forrest and Woden in offices which are managed by other Commonwealth agencies.

The proposed fit-out will provide the opportunity to co-locate all DCCEE staff and provide significant benefits in relation to functionality, operating efficiencies, administrative overheads and environmental ratings. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction of the fit-out is expected to commence in September 2011, with completion scheduled for August 2012. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

HEALTHCARE IDENTIFIERS BILL 2010
Cognate bill:
HEALTHCARE IDENTIFIERS (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 10 March, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (9.24 am)—Last night prior to the adjournment, I was taking the House through all of the initiatives that the federal government has implemented in relation to health, from the initiation of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission inquiry back in February 2008 right through to the significant increase—up to 50 per cent—in health funding, the increase in training places and other initiatives.

In contrast, the Liberals in government, under the stewardship of the then health minister, now Leader of the Opposition, slashed $1 billion from public hospitals. They caused a national shortage in the medical workforce by freezing medical student places and capping GP training places, leading to a critical doctor shortage affecting 60 per cent of the population. They did nothing to plan for fu-
ture challenges like the ageing population and the growing burden of chronic disease.

Last night in the debate on these bills, the member for Herbert referred to the problems associated with Townsville Hospital. I do have to ask: on how many occasions, when both the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Herbert were in government and the Leader of the Opposition was health minister, did the member for Herbert on behalf of his constituents actually raise concerns about Townsville Hospital and how the federal government should assist?

It is important also to look at the Liberal Party since coming into opposition in 2007. They opposed the alcopops legislation, which was an important measure to address binge drinking by young people; they opposed the Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill, which sought to establish the first-ever national approach to preventive health through this national preventive health agency; they opposed means testing for private health insurance, which would ensure that the government provides rebates in a way that is fiscally responsible and direct taxpayer dollars into areas that are most in need, such as health reform.

Mr Tony Abbott is working hard to distinguish himself from the previous leaders of the opposition and the Rudd Labor government. This leader of the opposition is doing so by saying ‘no’ in the Senate on every policy that has been put forward in the area of health. Mr Abbott’s latest example of this is the rejection of the private health insurance rebate bill. This decision blows a $2 billion hole in the budget and, by the middle of this century, it will be a $100 billion hole. This is money that would be better spent within the health system. Unfortunately this is not the only piece of legislation that is being blocked in the Senate when it comes to health and important priorities for the community.

The landmark legislation that will give more support and recognition to midwives and nurse practitioners has been delayed month after month after month, and the Liberal Party have not yet agreed to support this important reform within the health system. The opposition have twice blocked changes that we took to the last election to make sure that we could provide more than a million extra dental services to the most needy in our community. Unfortunately, it is not only health reform that the opposition is blocking in the Senate. Even our young people wanting to study at university have been left in the lurch because of the opposition refusing to pass the income support for students bill. The protection of the environment into the future through the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is also a target for the opposition. In fact, the opposition has blocked 41 bills in the past year, which is four times as many as any other opposition in the past 30 years.

I have to say that the LNP candidate for Petrie has recently come out saying that he supports local hospital boards. I hope that means he will now support local hospital networks. The other members from Queensland in this chamber may be very interested to know that he says he is going to advocate strongly for Logan Hospital to be the first off the mark. I am sure that Logan is a lovely hospital, but Logan has about four other federal electorates between Petrie and where it actually resides, and it is certainly nowhere near outer northern metropolitan Brisbane.

Mr Ciobo interjecting—

Dr Emerson interjecting—

Mrs D’ATH—I would say good on the LNP candidate for Petrie promoting Logan as the first off the mark, but, as the member for Petrie, I will actually be advocating for Redcliffe Hospital and my local health pro-
essionals to support our area to be the first off the mark.

For the Rudd government the message is simple: we are serious about health reform; the opposition is serious about playing politics. This legislation before the House is part of the Rudd Labor government’s commitment to health reform and is another step forward to positive change. I commend the bills to the House.

The SPEAKER—I thank the Queensland members present in the chamber for not showing their territorial biases too much.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (9.29 am)—I rise to speak on the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and the Healthcare Identifiers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010, which are before the House this morning. There can be no doubt that for the Australian community health is one of the key national policy priorities for government. We have seen a shift in our aged population. In the early 1990s, around 12 per cent of the population were aged 65 and over. Based on demographics, we anticipate, with the affliction of time and the ageing of the population, that those Australians aged 65 and over will become roughly one in three—nearly 30 per cent of Australia’s population—in the next couple of decades. We have a landmark change happening across the Australian community in the number of older Australians.

The increasing number of older Australians, predominantly driven by the baby boomers, who were born after the Second World War, has meant a number of things. The first is that, where you have a large socialised health compact, as we have in Australia, there will be an increasing demand upon the services provided by the Commonwealth. Coupled with that is the fact that with the ageing of a large proportion of the population there will be fewer people actually contributing to Australia’s tax system. Indeed, with a large number we will be in the situation of having a net drawdown, so to speak, by taxpayers of consolidated revenue for services such as health.

It is crucially important that we continue to identify measures that can be taken to increase efficiency. We need to consistently utilise new technology to ensure that we develop maximum bang for our buck. That is crucial because, with a decline in the number of taxpayers paying tax and an increase in the number of taxpayers drawing on those services, we need to make our dollar stretch further. This is a problem that besets all governments. It is not something that is unique to the Labor Party and it is not something unique to the coalition; it is a common policy challenge, something that as a nation we must address.

The bill that is before the parliament today to some extent addresses this issue. It effectively provides a resource for government to ensure that we are able to gain greater efficiencies and improve productivity when it comes to the administration of the health system. The Healthcare Identifiers Bill will provide for a 16-digit identifier for every Australian and every healthcare provider. This will provide greater efficiencies when it comes to the administration of this scheme. If I look back over the past several years I am conscious of the fact that it was the previous coalition government that took perhaps some very bold steps—I would argue too bold—with respect to advocating for an access card. The access card, which some may consider a forerunner to or a super-duper version of a healthcare identifier card, on the plus side would have provided for greater efficiencies with respect to the administration not only of health but more broadly of the social welfare system in this country.

The concern that I had at the time, albeit it was a coalition initiative—and I certainly
spoke quite strongly within my own party room about the access card—was that a situation might arise where, with the passage of time and function creep, the access card would have become a national identity card. For Liberals like me the notion that we would hand up to government the power to have something like a national identity card was one step too far. We saw around the world other governments moving down that pathway. Indeed, the United Kingdom has moved down that pathway, forcing all citizens and residents in the United Kingdom to have a national identity card.

The parallel between that and the bill today means that those of us who are concerned about the relationship between the individual and the state must remain vigilant about where exactly we go with this legislation. On the face of it, the bill that is before the House is not, I believe, of significant concern. It is about efficiencies. It is about ensuring that government can utilise technology that will enable it to stretch its health dollar further, that will enable it to ensure that the administrative arrangements that are in place are utilised most efficiently and productively so that all Australians benefit from a more efficient system. Let’s be frank: there are not too many Australians who would argue that when it comes to government administration we are among the most efficient in the world. That notwithstanding, we need to be conscious of unintended consequences and function creep. These remain for me very serious considerations which I believe all members of this parliament should be concerned with.

The introduction of a healthcare identifier, which provides a 16-digit number for every single Australian, means that there will be, for the first time, a great ability for governments to have, through the use of that single identifier, access to a raft of health information on every single Australian. As I said, on the face of it I am comfortable with that insofar as it provides greater opportunity for efficiency and, perhaps even more importantly, the opportunity to ensure that, when it comes to the administration of health and linking patient records with patients, there is less room for error. That has to be a positive.

I certainly do not believe this legislation is bad. I think it has taken a long time to come about. We have had a vacuum for a couple of years now while this government has been ambivalent about which way to move. Nonetheless, it is in broad terms a logical and solid step forward in the administration of Australia’s health system.

I want to state on the record that I will continue to watch closely the development of policy around this bill and associated bills that deal with the labelling of each individual Australian with a single number which provides government greater access to records all administered through one number. I believe that we will see with the passage of time increasing pressure to utilise this number as successive governments say: ‘Look, we are only seeking to add on this particular function. We are only seeking to ensure that when it comes to your unique health identifier number we are only adding on this one particular aspect.’ Who knows what that will be? Perhaps it will be combined with passports in the future. Perhaps it will be combined with drivers licences in the future. Perhaps it will be combined with tax records in the future. Perhaps it will be combined with welfare records or family tax benefits in the future. There is a whole raft of different things that successive governments could say, ‘This will stop duplication and mix-ups.’

Each argument individually will make sense. Each time a government stands up and says, ‘Look, when it comes to making government more efficient we believe this is a step in the right direction.’ I concede that I
would agree with each one of those arguments if they were taken in isolation. But the problem we have as policymakers is that it is actually not that far of a journey between starting with a system like this and ending up with a situation that I foresee down the track: where each and every Australian has a 16-digit number identifier which links them back through all government records about them in all government agencies and departments. It would also seem logical to conclude that it would not be very long before criminal records, police investigations and all such matters are all linked as well to those unique 16-digit identifiers.

Some Australians, I concede, would have no problem with that. Some Australians would be very comfortable with government agencies being able to access all of those records at the push of one or several buttons. But we must remain vigilant about the abuse of power by governments. It is well and good for the population to say: ‘Well, we’ve got nothing to be concerned about. Governments have, over time in this country, proven that they don’t abuse powers.’ Other Australians would say there have been many examples of abuse of government power in the nation’s history. It all depends on your perspective. But I can say with authority that when you look around the globe you see many examples of governments misusing power as a direct result of the adoption of technology which enables all of that information to come to one particular person.

Over the past several weeks I was concerned when I saw numerous media reports talking in particular about the unauthorised access by bureaucrats of people’s private information in health records. When audited, there were thousands of examples of unauthorised personnel within Australian government agencies and departments that were accessing other people’s private information with no authority and—it would appear on the face of it—with no proper motive.

This has been a concern that the tax office has dealt with for some time. Occasionally we do see, unfortunately, from the tax office the personal tax records of high-profile individuals and celebrities being accessed without authorisation, and, on occasion, if memory serves me correctly, some of that information has spilled into the public arena. If I was one of those Australians, I would be saying, ‘Whose business is it that my private tax records should be out there in the public domain because a bureaucrat somewhere has taken it upon themselves to access my information and put it out there?’ That is just one single agency’s record. Can you imagine what the potential could be for the abuse of information if every single government record or piece of information about an individual was accessible from all departments through one unique identifier?

We might say, ‘Well, they’re celebrities and they can deal with it.’ The reality is, as recent media reports have demonstrated, there are many examples where people have misused and accessed information on other Australians. Perhaps it is a friend of the bureaucrat or someone who happens to be in the newspaper or the Woman’s Day that particular day, and their interest is piqued and they have a little squiz at what they have in their health or tax records. I would like to pretend that that is never going to happen but the truth is, as we have seen in recent weeks, it happens thousands and thousands of times every single year. It is for that reason that I think as Australians we need to remain vigilant about where these particular initiatives go—certainly I will as a policymaker.

But that is part of the broader fabric of the debate about when successive political parties take the reins of government and help to move Australia’s health system forward, and
the administration of Australia’s health, welfare and other systems when governments seek greater efficiencies. I am not a troglodyte. It is not that I believe that all technology is bad, but we must recognise that with this new technology in particular there is a greater ability to misuse the information that is contained within the 16-digit identifier.

I will touch upon some other health-related issues which are more pertinent and perhaps more germane to the aspects of this bill. I noted previously that the member for Petrie and others in this debate have railed against the coalition recently blocking the private health insurance legislation. The first point I would make is that the coalition is unable to block anything. We hear the Labor Party talking about how the coalition blocks this, that and the other, but it is simply untrue, because Labor members know that the coalition cannot block anything in the Senate. The coalition can be opposed to something but it requires other senators to support the coalition in order to block legislation.

It is simply convenient for the Labor Party to make out that their legislative agenda is frustrated, when in reality they have not been able to advocate a reason strongly enough for why other senators should support their legislation. We on this side of the House know bad legislation when we see it. We hear the Labor Party talking about how the coalition blocks this, that and the other, but it is simply untrue, because Labor members know that the coalition cannot block anything in the Senate. The coalition can be opposed to something but it requires other senators to support the coalition in order to block legislation.

In addition to that, you have really got to scratch your head when the Australian Labor Party stands up in this chamber and says, ‘How unfortunate and how dare the coalition block our attempts to make private health insurance less attractive to the Australian people.’ This is from the government whose Prime Minister, before the last election, hand on heart, said: ‘We will not touch private health insurance. Trust us. The Australian Labor Party has no ideological war with private health insurance. You can trust us. We won’t touch it; we won’t do anything to it.’ That is basically what the Prime Minister said. Lo and behold, less than two years later the original moves to gut private health insurance were made by the Labor Party. They have the audacity to come into this chamber and say, ‘How dare the coalition block it.’ I would say the Australian people recognise when a government is breaking a promise. How absolutely absurd for a member of the Australian Labor Party to come into the chamber and say, ‘How dare the coalition block our attempts to gut private health insurance.’ You know what? My response to the Australian Labor Party is: honour your election promises. How dare the Prime Minister walk into this House and seek to make a change to private health insurance after he promised that he would not.

Government members interjecting—

Mr CIOBO—I see the sensitivity of Labor members now.

Dr Emerson—Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the departure by the member for Moncrieff—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—What is your point of order?

Dr Emerson—It is on relevance. He is being irrelevant, and we are seeking to hon-
our election promises and they are being blocked.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The minister has no point of order. The member for Moncrieff will continue.

Mr CIOBO—We see the sensitivity of Labor members in this chamber. I notice that the minister at the table, the honourable member for Rankin, did not jump up when the member for Petrie was talking about this exact same issue. I notice the Labor members were nowhere to be seen when it came to the member for Petrie talking about the injustices of the coalition trying to force the Labor Party to honour their election promises. But now, when the truth comes out, we see them springing up trying to take points of order.

Let us look at the health system in this country, because we all know that one of the other promises made by the Prime Minister was that the buck would stop with him when it came to Australia’s health system. Now, two years later, we have the absolute debacle of administration of health in this country as the Prime Minister desperately tries to get state governments to stitch together and sign up to his particular initiative, if you want to call it that, on health. We saw the Labor Premier In Victoria, John Brumby, absolutely tear apart this Prime Minister and this government’s myopic approach to health administration in this country.

On a final point when it comes to health, I would like to touch upon Labor’s much vaunted proposal, which I believe should be much maligned, to deal with health through GP superclinics. In my own electorate of Moncrieff on the Gold Coast, the fastest growing region in this country, the coalition introduced a number of initiatives when we were in power to help provide Gold Coasters with greater access to health. One of those was funding for doctors to be able to treat patients after hours. The Labor Party said that that was not necessary because they would introduce a GP superclinic, which would facilitate access to doctors by the general public. In my seat they axed funding for after-hours medical treatment. What did they do? It would be logical to conclude they would have built a GP superclinic. But, no, here we are two years later, the sixth largest city in the country, and we have no GP superclinic. This is a government that ignores the sixth largest city in this country and expects to get the support of its citizens. They can forget about it, absolutely forget about it. I turn my back on their failed policies and I know my constituents will as well.

Ms REA (Bonner) (9.49 am)—It is because I rise to very clearly support the legislation that we are currently debating—the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and cognate legislation—and also because I am afraid that my colleague the member for Rankin will take a point of order on relevance, that I would like to address my remarks to the legislation rather than counter the irrelevant diatribe that we just heard in the last half of the member for Moncrieff’s speech.

This is a significant piece of legislation and, yes, there are issues that must be dealt with when it comes to dealing with people’s health records, and I will come to some of
those issues in a minute. Can I begin by saying that this legislation introduces a 16-digit number which could be the difference in saving someone’s life or indeed improving their quality of health care and therefore their wellbeing for the rest of their life. It is absolutely essential that, if we are going to provide better quality health care in this country—and we all acknowledge, across all levels of government and across the broader community, that there is a need to improve our health system—then we need to embrace the advantages of the digital age, the advantages of new technology, and look at ways in which we can use that technology to improve the healthcare system. This 16-digit number, the individual health indicator, that will be provided to every Australian will go a long way to improving the quality of health care. It is an important initiative. It is not a new one. It was agreed by COAG in 2006, which was prior to the election of the Rudd government, and indeed it was affirmed again by COAG in 2008. Clearly all of those in the government involved in the provision of healthcare services, whether at the state or Commonwealth level, acknowledge that this is a single, very significant reform that will improve health care for all Australians.

We acknowledge that the fundamental premise for anyone using the health system and being provided proper health care is the qualifications and skill of the medical practitioner they go to see. That is essential. But this particular reform means that we have acknowledged that sometimes even the most qualified, well-trained and clever medical practitioner can make a mistake or not provide the best health solution for that individual patient simply because they do not have all of the information or they do not have accurate information that will assist them in their diagnosis and their prescribed solution. This is a very important reform because it adds to the very skilled work done by our medical professionals. It makes their job easier and it also makes their job better in terms of providing appropriate health care. The statistics show that. There have been studies done in hospitals that show somewhere between 17 and 19 per cent of tests are unnecessary duplicates simply because there is a lack of information about a patient’s medical history. More significantly, 18 per cent of those tests showed medical errors were attributed to a lack of information. So we are not just talking about duplication or unnecessary treatments for people who have a medical history. We are actually talking about the potential for a wrong diagnosis or a wrong treatment. Eighteen per cent of those tests showed medical errors attributed to a lack of information.

So doesn’t it make sense for us to introduce a single, simple process at a national level which provides accuracy and consistency of information that will give everyone accessing the health services greater confidence that their medical practitioner, the health professional they have gone to see, will be able to give them the best quality care because they have all the information they need at their fingertips? It makes perfect sense. It is something I applaud the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing for introducing.

I think it is interesting that even amongst the broader medical community there is strong support for this initiative. In fact, during the consultations that occurred around the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission report, I invited a number of local health professionals within my electorate of Bonner to come and discuss with me the proposals that were put forward by the commission. We had a range of people there. We had nurses, doctors, allied health workers and people who worked in aged care in nursing homes—a broad range of people involved in the health sector. They were all very experi-
enced and skilled people and obviously very committed because they took time out of their busy days to come and sit down and have a discussion about the ways that they believed the health system could be improved. They offered us a range of suggestions that I think were very interesting and very exciting. What stood out to me was that, to a person in that room, the single reform they all said could change the quality of health care in this country was moving towards e-health and having a consistent and accurate database of information that was easily accessible by health professionals and health providers across the nation so that, no matter where you were or who you were, your medical history would be available to anyone you went to see because you needed medical advice or medical assistance.

I am very pleased that, having consulted with my local community, obviously this initiative has been reflected across the broader community and has come out as part of a recommendation in the reform commission’s report and has been acknowledged by the minister to the extent that we now have this legislation before us. I think this is a very exciting initiative. I know amongst the broader medical community and across the general Australian community there will be an acknowledgement that this will significantly improve our health system.

Of course, we will have to be mindful that there are issues around introducing an identification number. We have to be mindful that people are quite rightly concerned about anything that they may see as intruding on their privacy, particularly with something as sensitive as their medical history and health information. It would not be acceptable to anybody in this parliament if legislation were introduced that did not reflect and honour the need to protect privacy wherever appropriate. That is why I am pleased that as a result of this bill the health minister has included a number of initiatives and a number of safeguards that go towards protecting privacy. Indeed, the bill was drafted after three privacy impact assessments had been done, and all of the issues and concerns raised as a result of those assessments have been included in this legislation. It is important to point out to those opposite and those in the broader community who will want to make a bigger issue about the privacy impact of this legislation than the significant and positive improvements that this reform will make that safeguards have been identified to ensure that minimal demographic information will be required to assign and obtain healthcare identifiers. The service itself will not be the retainer of all that medical information. There will be minimal information in order to simply provide the process needed for health providers accessing this.

No clinical information will be held by the service operator. Only authorised healthcare providers will be able to access the healthcare identifier service and obtain healthcare identifiers for their existing patients. The Medicare card and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs treatment card are to be used as tokens to obtain an individual’s healthcare identifier. So it is very clear that the minister has listened to any concerns about privacy and has included very important and appropriate initiatives within this bill to ensure that we allow this service to be introduced and we enable medical practitioners to access significant information to support them in their job of caring for and curing the Australian community, but not at the expense of the privacy of information.

I said it earlier, but, on that point, I do think that I need to address some of the doomsday pessimism coming from those opposite on this issue. We do live in a digital age. Almost every single thing we do these days depends on a computer or some form of new technology. Information these days is...
disseminated, accessed and spread by new technologies. People pay for all sorts of goods and services using their credit cards over the internet. We know that this is no longer a novelty. We know it is not some sort of new thing that we like the look of but should be a little bit scared about. This is actually the way that we conduct our day-to-day business, so I do not think we need to be too scared anymore of using the advantages that these new technologies provide to improve the services that we as a government are responsible for providing to the Australian community. We need to embrace technology and use it for better. There is no better example than this bill, which takes advantage of technology through the simplicity of a national database and a 16-digit number—that is all it needs to be—to make the difference between living a good and healthy life and finding suffering and pain as a result of a wrong diagnosis or a wrong treatment. I think the bill speaks for itself and I commend it to the parliament.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (10.02 am)—I rise to speak on the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and the Healthcare Identifiers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010, which will see the introduction of a 16-digit identifier for every Australian and every healthcare provider. The introduction of these individual healthcare identifiers is a part of establishing a national e-health system for the future. Healthcare identifiers are just the first step in establishing this system to ensure a more cohesive, coordinated healthcare system for Australian patients.

The coalition is supportive of the concept of e-health. However, we, and I particularly, have very serious concerns and issues about the security of information under the system. An e-health system would provide an opportunity to improve health care in Australia. We have a healthcare system that we know is under pressure. For this reason, it is important to continue to improve health care in Australia across the board. As we know, Australia is behind countries such as Great Britain, Germany and Canada in the implementation of e-health measures. The systems introduced in these countries share diagnostic imagery between providers and e-prescription services and facilitate communication between providers, reducing the silo method of treating patients—important to each patient.

However, as I mentioned earlier, while I believe that a national system will provide for greater consistency of health care, I have a number of concerns surrounding the privacy and the security of patient information. In introducing the system, the government must categorically guarantee the security of patients’ information under this system. There are no ifs and buts—it must guarantee that. My questions arise because the government is yet to really outline the stringent regulatory framework to ensure absolute security of health information further into the future.

I note that, in an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, the National E-Health Transition Authority has admitted it is yet to decide how access control would work, yet we have the bill before the House today. To further compound the problem, the system is due to start on 1 July, yet the software makers have not yet been provided with the specifications to design an appropriate IT framework or to integrate healthcare identifiers into existing software packages. This alone should be of concern to everyone in this parliament. We have previously seen firsthand the problems of rushed and bungled legislation—the tragic Home Insulation Program, for example.

I have very genuine concerns about exactly how the government will guarantee the security of this patient information. That and
the lack of thoroughness of this legislation have also been raised by doctors and others. An article in the *Australian* on 19 January stated that doctors and other experts have raised concerns about breaches of patient privacy and criticised the rushed and limited one-month consultation period for the new laws—conducted over a holiday period. The article quoted the Royal Australian College of GPs as stating that greater clarity was needed about who would have access to patient information and whether doctors needed their patient’s consent before using a healthcare identification number. Recently we have heard that Medicare has investigated over 1,000 employees for potential unauthorised access to client records in the past three years. If Medicare is going to be the handler of Australian patients’ personal information, then clearly we have very serious concerns about the security and integrity of these processes.

The National E-Health Transition Authority’s Dr Haikerwal also raised concerns over the Labor government’s proposed e-health legislation, but this time in regard to the costs of the system. In the *Herald Sun*, Dr Haikerwal said:

> If you look at e-health systems around the world, the cost falls on to the shoulders of the healthcare providers; the benefits are reaped by the patients and Government.

The government released a discussion paper in June 2009 and drafted this legislation in December 2009. Fifty-five organisations and individuals made submissions on the draft legislation and while most were supportive of the legislation they raised a number of technical points, including the possibility that doctors may be in breach of legislation by disclosing healthcare recipients’ identifiers, the exclusion of private health funds from using the new healthcare identifiers and the compliance costs of an extra level of privacy legislation.

As I have stated previously, we continually see examples of the Labor government rushing health legislation without serious, detailed and inclusive consultative processes. We saw the government’s attempt to target thousands of Australians by proposing that the most vulnerable, those needing cataract surgery, would have to pay hundreds of dollars more for life-changing cataract surgery. As we know, the majority of those are seniors—the very people who can least afford to pay more. There was the IVF debacle where the minister was forced to backflip on the government’s proposed halving of the Medicare rebate for IVF treatment. The WA Liberal government has also expressed concerns about the rollout of GP superclinics in Western Australia, and we have also seen the Labor government continue its attack on those with private health insurance. Fortunately for those holders of private health cover in my electorate, the Senate voted against that legislation two days ago.

Australians deserve a national system that will provide for greater consistency of health care but, in such a system, they also must have absolute confidence in the government guaranteeing complete security of their private information. I am particularly interested in, but extremely concerned with, the processes that the government will use to provide this guarantee of privacy and the penalties for those who access, use, pass on or sell the information.

An article in the *Medical Observer* referring to Medicare staff who had accessed patients’ information illegally quotes a Medicare spokesperson as saying:

> … there would be an audit log of all access to healthcare identifier systems, which would be used to identify potential inappropriate access.

Well, this is no deterrent at all. This is like shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. And I have no doubt that those seeking to
access the information will still do so. The Medicare spokesperson went on to say that ‘customers would also be able to use the log to learn when their UHI record had been accessed’. Again, this is too late. Who has it? Where is it? What is being done with it? You might be able to identify that someone has accessed it, but they have already got it and it has gone. I do not know what sort of comfort that will be to people. If you can tell your UHI record has been accessed, it is already too late. Whoever wanted that information, such as someone with potential commercial gain, already has it. And, in a broader e-health sense, I would suggest that no Australian would want their personal medical information broadcast to the world or used for any purpose without their express permission. I can only imagine the concerns of someone who may be suffering from depression or any member who has any particular personal or private medical condition—and such conditions are often extremely sensitive—and the trauma for those same people if those details are publicised or used illegally.

The very same article in the Medical Observer quoted Dr David More, a health IT consultant, as saying:

If Medicare cannot manage its own staff, and not have them snooping, then we have to wonder about trusting them with the UHI numbers, and eventually with e-health records …

I share Dr More’s concern and hope that he is one person whom the Senate inquiry takes evidence from. I want to see the security measures for the storage and transfer of e-health details and the regulatory framework in which e-health is set to operate.

As a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, which is currently investigating cybercrime, I make a very, very strong recommendation also that the Senate inquiry take evidence and information from those involved in investigating cybercrime, such as the Australian Federal Police, state-based technology crime investigation units, security organisations and various cybercrime agencies. Given the evidence we have taken during the hearings into cybercrime, I think there is a serious issue in relation to the capacity of government to guarantee the security of patients’ information from both domestic and international hackers, from organised crime elements in time and from those who seek to profit from the information contained in patients’ records—and there will be many who have a very direct and significant commercial and vested interest in e-health records. There are also those, I would suggest, who would be prepared to pay, and pay well, for perhaps Medicare staff, or whoever has access to the healthcare identifier systems, to allow them to access information. We do not need another rushed program. The potential for misuse and harm is too great. The Senate inquiry must fully explore and expose any and all of the potential flaws in this proposal.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (10.12 am)—I am pleased to speak this morning in support of the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and its related bill. This bill is designed to establish a national Healthcare Identifiers Service. It also sets out arrangements for its operation and its functions, which will be to assign, issue and maintain healthcare identifiers for individuals, healthcare providers and organisations. This bill is one of many that we have had before the parliament through the term of this government that is about preparing our healthcare system for the future, making sure that the healthcare system that Australians rely on now will be there for them well into the future, delivering the care and the services they need.

When the Rudd Labor government took office in 2007 we knew that we had a lot of work ahead of us to undo the damage done to
Australia’s health system by 11 years of the Howard government’s neglect and under-funding. Who can forget the legacy of the former Howard government’s health minister, now Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, who presided over the ripping out of $1 billion from the public hospital system? Our constituents are still feeling the effects of his decision to cap GP training places each time they call their local doctor’s clinic to be told that there will be a week’s wait to see a doctor or, even worse, that the books at that particular clinic are closed to new patients.

We got to work on this huge task straight-away. Already in our two years of office the government has put significant new funding into health and put forward initiatives to solve some of the immediate problems we inherited from the previous coalition government. There has been a 50 per cent increase in hospital funding over the next five years in Australian healthcare agreements with the states and territories, and this represents a $64 billion investment. We have committed an unprecedented $1.1 billion investment towards training our doctors, nurses and health professionals, not the least of which is a 35 per cent increase in the number of GP training places. We are funding a rural doctors incentive scheme that now extends to 500 additional communities, and I am pleased to say that a number of those communities are in my electorate. As a result, there are incentives for 2,400 additional doctors to encourage them to stay in the bush.

There is now a greater emphasis on preventative measures, including an $872 million investment in programs to be rolled out in schools, workplaces and local communities to focus on reducing risk factors such as smoking and obesity and encourage people to increase their physical activity and eat healthily. For the first time, the Australian government is investing more than $1.8 billion directly into expanding emergency departments, post-acute care and elective surgery. Also for the first time, the Australian government is investing directly in the capital needs of local hospitals. Rockhampton Base Hospital, which is the largest hospital in Capricornia, received $76 million in last year’s budget for an expansion that will mean more operating facilities, more training facilities and a capacity for the hospital to deliver more cancer services in the future.

This funding, which is not insignificant, and these initiatives deal with some of the most pressing issues, such as waiting lists, infrastructure and workforce. But we know that we have a health system that is stretched to breaking point right now and is in no shape to cope with the demands of the future. That is why the government has also engaged in the extremely challenging work of looking at the structural reform required to meet those and other future demands. The report produced last year by the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission was very clear—our health system is not prepared for future challenges, for a number of reasons. Those challenges are well known to all of us. First of all, we know that we are facing an ageing population, and that means an increase in the healthcare needs of the overall community and an increase in the cost of meeting those needs. Our population overall will grow, calling for more health services infrastructure and a larger health workforce.

The rates of chronic disease are projected to grow. For example, type 2 diabetes is projected to increase by more than 520 per cent between 2002 and 2032. That is a staggering increase over a relatively short time. The workforce shortages that already impact on our health system will not go away. We need to be training more health professionals and doing more to make the most of the skills of the various parts of the health workforce. The recent Intergenerational report rein-
forced the need for change. That report included estimates that by halfway through the century health costs would consume the entire revenue raised by state governments. Furthermore, the ballooning of health costs presents risks to the entire Australian economy. In light of those warnings, the only answer is reform of the health system in a big way.

Again, the work of the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission highlighted the weaknesses in our present system that need to be addressed if our health system is to be strong and sustainable into the future, if it is going to be there for all Australians in the way we have rightly come to expect. The first of these weaknesses is that there is too much blame and fragmentation going on amongst governments. At the moment we have eight different health systems split between our states and territories, and we also have Commonwealth funding for various parts of the health system but this is not necessarily in any logical order. Responsibilities for health between the different levels of government are very unclear, resulting in duplication, cost shifting and blame shifting.

The classic example that always comes to my mind is a community in my electorate where there is a small rural hospital and right next to the hospital is a GP clinic. The same doctor services the public hospital and has the right of private practice. There is no problem with that, but you end up with patients being sent over to have a procedure done in his clinic, I do not believe for any clinical reason—it is the same doctor—but the cost then does not come out of the Queensland Health budget attached to the hospital; it is billed to the Commonwealth through Medicare. I do not think there is any healthcare impact of people having to walk from the hospital to the surgery, but it just highlights the unnecessary cost shifting and complication that is there, just in one small town in my electorate. If you can imagine that happening right across the health system, you can understand why that fragmentation and those incentives for cost shifting are such a problem.

There are also gaps and poor coordination in health services that people need. So, again, particularly elderly people or people with chronic illnesses will be accessing a suite of different services being provided by a whole range of health providers. Some of those are going to be Commonwealth funded and some will be state funded, and some will be half and half. When there are those gaps or this lack of coordination, you can just see that there is room for people to fall through the cracks and not have their health needs met, or certainly not have them met in an efficient or timely manner.

There is too much pressure on our public hospitals and health professionals. In Australia we have much higher rates of hospital admission than other comparable countries. Our public hospitals are just the default for anything that happens in our health system, and of course we know that that is not the most efficient or cost-effective way of dealing with many of the health problems that we have. Certainly as we look into the future, where chronic disease is going to take up much more of the health system’s time and resources, public hospitals will not necessarily be the answer to meeting those needs.

There is also too much waste and inefficiency. The Commonwealth government currently funds states with block grants for public hospital services. Even though we know that some states are delivering services more efficiently than others, it is still difficult to identify exactly where that is happening and to reward those who are meeting best practice. The government has seen the warnings in the Intergenerational report and from the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission
and have also listened to the views and experiences of thousands of health professionals and advocates during more than 100 consultations in hospitals and communities around the country. We are convinced that now is the time to act if we are to build an efficient and reliable healthcare system, and that is what we are going to do.

A major part of the government’s reform plan for health was announced last week. For the first time the Commonwealth government will take on majority funding responsibility for public hospitals, along with full funding and policy responsibility for GP and primary health care. The government will use its position as the majority funder of health and hospital services to impose strong national standards for health care and build a nationally unified health system. That is the plan that will go for discussion to the COAG meeting with the premiers at the beginning of April. We hope that the premiers can come on board with that plan because the warning in the Intergenerational report was that state revenue bases are just not going to be able to handle the pressures coming down the line towards them—the demands from the healthcare system. They are not going to have the financial wherewithal to deal with those pressures and this is a way for the Commonwealth government to step up and take on that financial responsibility—but, through assuming that responsibility, we also want to be able to build a properly unified health system that overcomes some of those current weaknesses that were identified in the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission report.

As I said at the outset, this bill is part of the government’s looking to the future and looking to what we need to do to prepare a future health system that is strong, sustainable and on a financially secure footing. One of the areas that the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission spent some time on in their report was the whole question of e-health—electronic health. That is what this bill is taking steps towards. The Healthcare Identifiers Service will be asked to provide a national capability to accurately and uniquely identify individuals and healthcare providers to enable reliable healthcare related communication between individuals, providers and provider organisations. This is something that the previous government and COAG have been working towards for some time now. There is a general recognition that we have to do much more in the area of e-health if we are to capture the efficiencies, increase effectiveness and have better coordination within our healthcare system.

I was reading through the national e-health strategy, which was prepared for the government by Deloittes. They put the benefits of e-health as moving towards an individual electronic health record that each patient, each person, in Australia will have control of and that will seamlessly and efficiently transfer information about that individual patient to all the sections of the healthcare system that they interact with. The challenge that the national e-health strategy report puts out is:

The Australian health system is straining to deal with increasing cost and demand pressures and a shortage of skilled health workers. Given this reality, we need to move to a system where every interaction between consumers and care providers achieves maximum impact on health outcomes and where scarce financial and human resources are deployed as effectively as possible.

I believe an individual electronic health record does give consumers and individuals much more power and input into managing their health and their interaction with the health system. It also means that care providers and healthcare managers can reliably and securely access and share health information in real time across geographic and health sector boundaries.
When you look at what we are missing out on in this area under the present system, you see there are real costs. Most seriously and significantly, costs occur in the medical areas when there are bits of paper held all over the place—some in the public hospitals and some with your GP. Some of the figures show that up to 10 per cent of visits to GPs are of people seeing that GP for the first time. I am not sure whether that is the figure I read in preparation for today, but I wonder whether it might be even a higher figure than that. When you have people travelling around in an electorate like mine, where a lot of people are doing fly-in fly-out work in the mining industry, there is a lot of mobility between communities. Studies have found that up to 18 per cent of medical errors are due to the inadequate availability of patient information, because at the moment it is up to patients to be transferring all of that information and taking that information with them and making sure they are giving it to the right person at the right time. These adverse events coming out of that lack of coordination represent approximately $3 billion in avoidable annual expenditure, money that could be better spent absorbing additional health sector demands driven by an ageing and sicker population. The government is convinced that this is the right way to go, that we should be moving towards the development of electronic health records, but putting in place the Healthcare Identifiers Service is the first step.

The previous speaker talked about the issues of privacy and the integrity and security of information contained in any electronic health system. That is a big part of what the Healthcare Identifiers Service will be doing. This legislation also makes minor amendments to the Privacy Act 1988 and the Health Insurance Act 1973 to support the robust privacy framework which has been developed for the Healthcare Identifiers Service. Privacy and security of that information is very important.

I notice, in reading the e-health strategy documents, that with an electronic health record the idea is for the consumer, the individual, to have control, to have access to that record. In some ways, that actually gives some more security and more peace of mind than might otherwise be the case. That kind of electronic sharing of data brings with it a trail or a record so that the individual consumer can keep track of who has accessed that information. I know that I have a health file at the Rockhampton Base Hospital, but how do I know where it is right now, who might be looking at it, who looked at it yesterday or what they did with it? The evidence there on electronic health records indicates that there is the capacity for those records to have an electronic trail that would allow consumers to give themselves peace of mind on who is accessing their information, when and why.

This legislation is very clear on the importance of that privacy. It explicitly limits the adoption, use and disclosure of healthcare identifiers to healthcare information management and communication purposes as part of delivering healthcare services or for other related purposes. There are also penalties for the misuse of healthcare identifiers by the Healthcare Identifiers Service operator or any other persons or organisations.

We are going to continue towards the development of this electronic health capacity, because we see that it is complementary to what we are trying to do in reducing the fragmentation and duplication that goes on in our current system. I support the legislation that is before the House.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (10.32 am)—Before I start my speech, I would like to commend the member for Capricornia for her models on the increasing incidence of
chronic disease. I support her in a lot of what she said.

The Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and cognate bill aim to implement a national system for consistent identification of customers and healthcare providers, and set out purposes for which healthcare identifiers can be used.

In July 2004, health ministers endorsed the formation of the jointly funded National E-Health Transition Authority. The authority was to be responsible for establishing a national health information management and information and communication technology entity. One of its fundamental objectives was the development of a patient identification system, which, together with a product and medicines database and national provider index, was to contribute to a national shared e-health record. COAG agreed to accelerate the development of a national electronic health records system in 2006 with funding of $130 million to June 2009.

In 2007 COAG agreed to a further $218 million over three years and signed the National Partnership Agreement on E-Health. This signed agreement outlines a framework for cooperative jurisdictional arrangements and responsibilities for e-health. It sets out the objectives and scope for the Healthcare Identifiers Service, as well as relevant governance, legislative, administrative and financial arrangements. Once enacted, this bill will operate in conjunction with this agreement to support the operation of the service.

Implementation of a national healthcare identifiers system will: support messaging from one healthcare provider to another by providing a consistent identifier that can be used in communication; facilitate electronic communications between providers by establishing a way for healthcare providers to look up the contact details of other healthcare providers; and support the implementation of a security and access framework to ensure the appropriate authorisation and authentication of healthcare providers who access national e-health infrastructure.

The communication of health information and accurate identification of individuals is a critical part of effective health care. It is estimated that 10 per cent of hospital admissions are due to adverse drug events and up to 18 per cent of medical errors are a result of inadequate access to patient information. The use of individual healthcare identifiers will assist healthcare providers to accurately match the correct records to their patients and improve the accuracy when communicating information to other healthcare providers.

Greater accuracy of information available is not only critical to effective health care for the individual but it also enables greater efficiency and productivity. Other countries which have implemented e-health systems have demonstrated significant improvements in productivity. It is thought that the implementation of e-prescriptions in Sweden, Boston and Denmark has reduced providers’ costs and time, resulting in an improvement of productivity of over 50 per cent. E-referrals in Denmark have reduced the average time spent on referrals by 97 per cent; and in America and France test ordering and results management systems have reduced time spent by physicians chasing up test results by over 70 per cent.

By outlining solutions for e-prescriptions, e-referrals and electronic test ordering, it is estimated that Australia’s e-health strategy will reduce by 10 per cent the time currently spent by care providers in discovering information. This conservative figure may not sound significant, but in net present value terms this is in the order of $2.8 billion over 10 years. Around 25 per cent of a clinician’s time is spent seeking information about a
patient, and 35 per cent of referrals are inappropriate as a result of insufficient direct access to specialists and insufficient information being passed from primary care to specialist. I can vouch for that problem.

Another concerning issue within our healthcare system is unnecessary or duplicated treatments. It is thought that unnecessary duplicate testing in hospital environments occurs at a rate of around nine per cent to 17 per cent—and I would suggest that that is a pretty conservative estimate. It is estimated that the implementation of e-health will result in a 15 per cent reduction in unnecessary tests. Based upon an average cost of $36 per test this would result in benefits of around $800 million in net present value over a 10-year period.

Although those healthcare providers who elect to participate may incur some costs associated with complying with required regulations, the system will result in efficiencies in a number of areas. The use of identifier numbers is likely to result in improved business practices and more efficient communication with other providers. Costs that may be incurred would include the upgrading of IT systems to incorporate appropriate minimum standards and security features to access the Healthcare Identifiers Service. However, the service draws heavily on the same IT infrastructure as Medicare Online. So for those providers that already have this in place that will be of no concern. The other cost will be the time required to educate and train staff; however, reference materials will be available to minimise this time outlay. A public awareness program via a range of methods will provide consumers with information about the service and its benefits. Those healthcare provider organisations that elect to participate in the service will also be provided with materials and appropriate sources of information to provide to patients.

An individual healthcare identifier will not be required for claiming healthcare benefits. So, if the healthcare provider is unable to obtain a person’s identifier for whatever reason, the patient may still undergo treatment. The implementation of the system will not affect anonymous healthcare services that are currently provided. Where lawful and practical, individuals may still seek healthcare treatments and services on an anonymous basis.

As Medicare Australia will be the operator of the Healthcare Identifiers Service, the bill confers functions upon the CEO of Medicare Australia. These functions include: assigning, collecting and maintaining identifiers for individuals, individual healthcare providers and organisations by using information already held by Medicare Australia for its existing functions; collecting information from individuals and other data sources; developing and maintaining mechanisms for users to access their own records and to correct or update details; using and disclosing healthcare identifiers and associated personal information for the purposes of operating the service; and disclosing healthcare identifiers for other purposes set out in the bill.

The bill outlines what permitted purposes for identifiers may be disclosed and the offences and relevant penalties for misuse or breach of the legislation. This clear framework supports the proper use and disclosure of healthcare identifiers. The Federal Privacy Commissioner will provide independent regulation of how healthcare identifiers are handled and of the operation of the service and will handle any complaints that are made. Where states have existing privacy arrangements, including an appropriate regulator, that regulator will be responsible for handling complaints which are made against a public sector organisation in their jurisdiction. For those states and territories that do not have such arrangements, these will also
be handled by the Federal Privacy Commissioner.

The bill also establishes a ministerial council, whose key functions include development and review of regulations to support the operation of the service and the issuing of policy directions to the service operator, Medicare.

The service will be funded until 30 June 2012 as part of the $218 million allocated by COAG to the National E-Health Transition Authority. Of the $218 million, $52.02 million has been allocated to the operation of the service by Medicare. Funding beyond this date will need to be determined between the states and territories and the Commonwealth. In addition to this funding, $0.5 million has been allocated by the Commonwealth for the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner for regulatory oversight and advice on the introduction of the identifiers.

In summary, a national e-health system will improve safety and quality of healthcare in this country. It will improve access for healthcare providers to reliable healthcare information when and where it is needed. It will enhance shared care of complex medical problems and chronic disease. I would emphasise that as a major failure of Medicare currently, which is dysfunctional in the management of chronic disease. A national e-health system will reduce the burden on the health sector through better health management; improve healthcare planning to ensure resources are directed to where they are needed most; and, most importantly, save lives through better decision support, increased access to information and reduction of adverse events.

Obviously, there must be appropriate security measures and standards imposed throughout the health sector to ensure that privacy and confidentiality of information are maintained and that there is the capacity for effective handling of complaints and review of the service. I would suggest, just light heartedly, that it is better to be alive and well than to have a little confidentiality breached and be dead. A bill which aims to introduce such a national e-health system is to be commended.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (10.44 am)—I would like to recognise the contribution made by the member for Moore. He has had a long history in health care. As a doctor in this place, he has helped quite a number of members of parliament from time to time.

I take this opportunity to make my contribution in the debate on the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and cognate bill. This legislation is another example of why Australia’s healthcare system—and of course Labor’s Medicare system is at the heart of our country’s health system—is one of the best systems in the world. This legislation and Labor’s proposed healthcare reform program, as announced by the Prime Minister last week, show a pathway towards maintaining our mantle as having the best system in the world.

This legislation shows a core quality that is one of the primary reasons we have such a fantastic system that is the envy of the world. This quality is the quality of continual improvement. We know we have a fantastic system, but we do need to continue to work on it and refine it to ensure that it delivers for all Australians. We have to be vigilant and keep reviewing and improving our healthcare system. This legislation is about building the best healthcare system for the future—future-proofing our system.

The Healthcare Identifiers Bill will establish a national Healthcare Identifiers Service and sets out arrangements for its operation and its functions which will assign, issue and maintain healthcare identifiers for individuals, healthcare providers and organisations.
This bill will provide a national capability to accurately and uniquely identify individuals and healthcare providers to enable reliable healthcare communication between individuals, providers and provider organisations. This approach to healthcare identifiers was agreed by COAG, the Council of Australian Governments, in February 2006 as part of accelerated work on electronic health records to improve patient safety and increase efficiency for healthcare providers.

We know this issue has some risks. The importance of confidentiality and security of information is paramount. So we know there is risk, but we also know that that risk can be managed. We also know we have to take this step for the sake of providing better healthcare services and for the efficiency that electronic health records provide. We also know from similar types of projects in other institutions in our society that we will be able to do it well.

I believe that this is a very big step in developing a future health system that is more efficient, more flexible, more reliable and safer for those involved. This legislation establishes the Healthcare Identifiers Service and allocates functions to Medicare Australia as the initial service operator. Medicare Australia’s existing information and service infrastructure is to be used to establish the individual and provider identifiers.

The key objective of the Healthcare Identifiers Service will be to provide a national capability to accurately and uniquely identify individuals and healthcare providers to enable reliable healthcare related communication between individuals, providers and provider organisations. The identifiers are a fundamental building block for the national e-health system.

E-health has the potential to improve patient safety and of course health outcomes for all of us. We should consider these facts as key drivers. It is estimated that between 30 and 50 per cent of patients with chronic diseases are hospitalised because of inadequate care management. Up to 18 per cent of medical errors are attributed to inadequate availability of patient information and between nine and 17 per cent of pathology and diagnostic tests are unnecessary duplicates. Think of the waste when these statistics are translated into dollars across the system. If we could just halve these error rates—and e-health records hold out real promise in this regard—we would save our country billions of dollars over the decades to come. This money of course could be reinvested into other new and emerging technologies. Think of the many ways this money could be spent to further improve the treatment that patients receive. E-health has the capability to radically improve the amount of waste and, therefore, make our fantastic health system even better at delivering for all of us.

In my electorate of Corangamite, I recently released a four-point plan to improve the health of the region. It is about creating better health solutions in my region. The last federal health minister in the Howard government, Mr Abbott, did tremendous damage by ripping more than a billion dollars out of our health system and capping the number of GP training places. This is having a real impact in regions like Corangamite where there are skill shortages today. The key parts of the plan that I announced strongly support the Rudd government’s health reforms, which will establish local hospital networks to be run by health and financial professionals—who will be responsible for running local hospitals rather than central bureaucracies.

We will work with local councils and sports clubs to apply for one of the Australian government’s Healthy Communities comprehensive five-year intervention trials, whereby sports clubs and officials will be funded to significantly raise the level of par-
ticipation of young people in sport. This will particularly relate to the Colac Otway region. Sport is fundamental in securing better health outcomes in the long term.

We will work with Deakin University medical school to ensure that nursing training continues to be rolled out across the region as well as the training of new GPs who will be coming out of the Deakin University medical school over the next few years so that they can take up the opportunity to practise medicine in regional communities such as Corangamite.

Better e-health and better data are critical in making and developing the case in each of these areas. If we are able to integrate information and share that information where appropriate amongst healthcare providers and individuals, it will lead to much stronger outcomes for the patients.

The Colac Otway region, which is a very important part of my electorate, has high health needs in different areas and, due to the nature of the region, hospitals are not often that close. The federal government is attempting to undertake a massive shift in our health spending based on preventative health. I think that an e-health record is very important in terms of setting up strong, well thought through, individually tailored, preventative health strategies. Good e-health services are central to that policy shift, in my view.

One of the local proposals I have put forward in the area of preventative health in our region is to secure the opportunity of being part of the five-year preventative health trials, and having strong e-health records will assist with that. I want to see our local shire councils combine with our sports clubs and other health stakeholders to drive participation in sport, and an e-health platform is very much an enabler of that.

The most important organisations in our shire and our region, in terms of keeping young people active, are the sports clubs. Good e-health capabilities will, in my view, enable us to design systems to analyse the impacts that sporting activities might have over a significant period of time.

The federal government’s preventative health strategy has a vision for Australia to be the healthiest country by 2020. The strategy provides the road map for a series of strategic and practical actions to be implemented across all sectors between now and 2020. The preventative health strategy is being driven by projected future costs in our healthcare system, which are experiencing significant pressure particularly because of our ageing population. In light of this projection, in 2006 the Council of Australian Governments, COAG, established the Australian Better Health Initiative with the aim of refocusing the health system towards promoting good health and reducing the burden of chronic disease. Good e-health systems go hand in hand with these initiatives.

These bills are about taking a national approach to ensure that the frameworks and the key infrastructure components are coordinated and aligned across Australia. The Commonwealth portion of funding for the costs of operating the Healthcare Identifiers Service, which totals $52 million over the next couple of years, was agreed through the Strategic Priorities and Budget Committee on 26 November 2008 as part of the total amount of $218 million to provide this e-health framework. The Commonwealth share will be $26.01 million, which is 50 per cent of those costs. I believe that spending this money is one of the best things we can do to invest in a modern healthcare system for the future.

I should also note that the identifiers will not hold any clinical information. They are
not electronic health records but they are a key step in building the infrastructure for an electronic health record into the future. They are the building blocks for a thoroughly modern future health system. Individual health identifiers, IHiS, will be allocated to all individuals who receive health care in Australia, but consumers will not be refused health care if their identifier is not available for some reason. The IHI will be generated as a temporary number in situations where an individual cannot be identified at the point of care—such as in emergency situations such as traffic accidents—or where a person is not entitled to Medicare provisions, such as tourists who have come to Australia.

In conclusion, this legislation has very lengthy origins and was developed as part of a COAG process. I will not go through all of the steps, but, most recently, on 7 December 2009, COAG considered a report on the outcomes of the public consideration on health-care identifiers and privacy and signed a national partnership agreement setting out cooperation between jurisdictions and arrangements for e-health, including the Healthcare Identifiers Service.

The government has committed to work and consult closely with government agencies, state and territory governments and clinical, community and consumer stakeholders in the rollout of the Health Identifiers Service. The Minister for Health and Ageing is required to have a report prepared on the operation of the IHI service and the legislation, which will be tabled in both houses of parliament. This legislation has all the checks and balances that ought to be required in legislation of this nature. It is legislation that is on the cutting edge of a modern healthcare system in Australia. It is legislation that will be good for Australia, will save billions of dollars into the future and will provide better health outcomes for all of us. I commend these bills to the House.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (10.59 am)—I rise to speak in support of the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and the Healthcare Identifiers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010. Since coming to office in November 2007, the Rudd government has embarked on a major reform of the Australian health system, a reform needed in response to both the immediate health needs of today and the changing health needs and growing health costs of the future. Treasury estimates have concluded that by 2045 health spending will consume the entire budget of the state governments. That is something that we certainly need to be aware of and plan for accordingly.

Health needs have weighed down the health services in Australia for over a decade, and I have to say that in that respect the previous government largely ignored the reforms that were needed. We have a national health system that is financially inefficient and which does not deliver the best possible care to the Australian people. The Rudd government has made it a priority to address the inefficiencies in Australia’s health system and to ensure Australians have access to better health services. To date, the Rudd government has increased health and hospital funding by 50 per cent to $64 billion over the next five years. That funding includes: $1.1 billion to train more doctors, nurses and allied health workers, in the largest ever investment in the health workforce; $750 million to take pressure off emergency departments; upgrades of 37 hospitals around the country; $500 million for subacute facilities, including rehabilitation, palliative care, geriatric evaluation and psychogeriatric services; $600 million in an elective surgery waiting list reduction plan that has delivered more than 62,000 procedures, and new elective surgery equipment and operating theatres for 125 hospitals across the country; and $275 million for 36 GP superclinics around
Australia. I am pleased to say that one of those GP superclinics is in the electorate of Makin, and if time permits I will talk a little bit more about that later on.

There has been an $872 million investment in preventive health programs to be rolled out in schools, workplaces and local communities with a high incidence of chronic disease; $1.6 billion allocated to close the life-expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; $134 million invested in the rural and remote workforce; and $3.2 billion invested in health infrastructure projects, including $1.5 billion to upgrade 18 hospitals around the country, $1.3 billion over six years to modernise Australia’s cancer infrastructure, $430 million to upgrade 12 medical research and clinical training facilities and $293 million allocated for 2,000 transition care places.

Last week the Prime Minister announced the Rudd government’s national health reform proposal. It is a proposal that brings together the work of the Bennett health review and the subsequent widespread consultation by the government with health service providers and the community around the country as part of that review. Under the Rudd government’s national health reform proposal, the federal government will replace eight separate health systems with a single national health and hospitals network, combining all public hospitals and all GP services and related services; dedicate one-third of GST revenue directly to health and hospitals; and put local hospital networks in charge.

To deliver this system, the federal government will take 60 per cent of funding responsibility for public hospitals, take over full responsibility for GP and related services provided outside of hospitals and pay local hospital networks directly for each hospital service they deliver, rather than just handing over block funding grants to the states.

The measures in this bill are another important step in modernising Australia’s health system. It is a proposal that benefits the patient, the health professionals and the Australian taxpayers. As the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, stated in her second reading speech:

This new identifier system will facilitate reliable healthcare related communications, support the management of patient information in an electronic environment and provide the foundations necessary to support the development of a national e-health record system.

I note that this system is being implemented after agreement with all the Australian states and territories. In fact it was an agreement reached, if I recall correctly, in November 2008.

The existing system of medical data is outdated, inadequate and wasteful. As other members have pointed out, including the member for Corangamite, who has just spoken, it is estimated that between nine per cent and 17 per cent of medical tests are unnecessary duplicates, wasting both patient time and tens of millions of dollars. I agree with the member for Corangamite, who quite rightly asked the question: wouldn’t those tens of millions of dollars that are being wasted be better spent on services which the community is screaming out for but for which funds are not available? That is a stark example of how our health services across the country could be improved.

Looking at this from a patient’s perspective, we see that up to 18 per cent of medical errors are attributed to inadequate availability of patient information. One wonders about that figure not simply as a percentage but because of the emotional cost that patients incur as a result of medical errors, which in turn occur because the system could
be working much better—and making it work much better is exactly what this proposal aims to do.

I am aware that there have been some concerns expressed about this proposal, particularly concerns relating to the privacy of medical information not being properly protected and that wrong medical diagnoses may form part of a patient’s record. I was pleased to hear the member for Moore make a contribution to this debate because as a practicing GP he knows only too well the system that GPs currently operate under. In response to both of those matters, though, it is my view that both of those concerns are valid under today’s management of the health system. The privacy of medical information and wrong medical diagnosis are already issues under the existing system. Whilst it might have been an issue that was raised as part of the response to this proposal, it is my view that it is no greater issue than exists under the current arrangements.

On the issues of privacy and wrong medical diagnosis, the minister has stated that no clinical information will be held by the service operator. Only authorised healthcare providers will be able to access the Healthcare Identifiers Service and obtain healthcare identifiers for their existing patients. The Medicare card and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs treatment card are used as a token to obtain an individual’s healthcare identifier. In fact, the legislation was considered by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the Attorney-General’s Department and the Solicitor-General, amongst others. I also note that the issues of privacy are specifically dealt with by the consequential amendments that are attached to this bill.

Australians want the government to deliver a better health system. This message could not have been made clearer than in that which we are seeing in the lead-up to the South Australian state election, where health has become a dominant election issue, as it was in the last state election in 2006 and in the 2007 federal election. There has been a range of commitments made in the lead-up to the state election in South Australia. I am pleased to see that the South Australian Rann government is committing to building a brand new Royal Adelaide Hospital if it is re-elected—a brand new hospital that would deliver after many years the kinds of services that are required by the people of Adelaide; a brand new Royal Adelaide Hospital that has the support of much of the medical community in South Australia. Again, that was made abundantly clear last week when a number of key senior medical people from South Australia openly stated that we needed a new hospital in South Australia. It is a huge investment but it is required to ensure that the health services in South Australia in the future will be able to provide the level of services that the people quite rightly expect.

I am also pleased to see that only yesterday the Premier of South Australia, Mike Rann, committed an additional $44 million to the upgrade of the Modbury Hospital in my electorate of Makin. This $44 million is in addition to a $25 million commitment to establish a GP superclinic almost adjacent to the hospital. It is a $25 million commitment made up of $12.5 million of federal government funds and $12.5 million of state government funds. It will be a service that will complement the services provided by the Modbury Hospital. I reiterate something I said in this House only a couple of weeks ago about the Modbury Hospital. The hospital services the north eastern parts of Adelaide and has done so since 1973, when it was established by the Dunstan Labor government of the time. In 1993 the Liberals came to office in South Australia and immediately privatised the Modbury Hospital. As a result of privatising the Modbury Hospital,
the services from that hospital began to deteriorate—so much so that by the time the Labor government was re-elected in 2002 the local community was screaming out for the state government to take back control of the Modbury Hospital. At the expiration of the agreement with Healthscope, which was the private operator that had been managing the Modbury Hospital, in 2007 the state government did exactly that and took back ownership and control of the hospital in every sense of the word.

Since 2002 the Rann Labor government has committed $39 million in additional funding to begin to restore the services that the local community quite properly expect from that hospital. To see an additional commitment now of $44 million towards that hospital is something I certainly welcome. The $44 million includes the development of 25 purpose-built emergency cubicles and the redevelopment of levels 5 and 6 to provide 36 single rooms in those two levels. Those are two levels of the hospital that have been largely unused for several years now. The emergency services are the critical aspects of the hospital that the community wants to see upgraded. Again, as someone who represents the people out there and who has called for the upgrade of the emergency services department, it is something I certainly welcome.

I also welcome, and I have very much supported, the $25 million investment in the GP superclinic. One of the issues that was clearly raised with me when I visited the hospital in the lead-up to the 2007 election was that the hospital emergency department was dealing with an overwhelming number of people who were coming into the hospital but who could, and should, have otherwise gone to their local GP. But because they did not have access to their local GP for a range of services they were using the hospital, thereby draining not only the financial resources of the hospital but also the staff time needed to attend to them. The establishment of a $25 million GP superclinic in close proximity to the hospital will take that kind of pressure off the hospital and allow the hospital to get on with the services which hospitals are built for.

As part of health reform in this country, when the state Labor government came to office it embarked on a similar program to that which I am now seeing the Rudd Labor government do at a national level. I am pleased to see that the South Australian Minister for Health has come out in support of the Rudd government’s national health reform proposals. But the state Labor government at the time also embarked on a proposal of its own where it was going to reform the health system after a lengthy inquiry by Mr John Menadue, who is considered to be an authority on the provision of health services in this country.

Part of that reform meant that there was some restructuring of the Modbury Hospital. But I make it absolutely clear that the Modbury Hospital was built by a Labor government, it was privatised by a Liberal government—demonstrating their lack of interest in the services being provided by the hospital—and it took a state Labor government to bring it back into the public fold and make real commitments to ensuring that the hospital is able to deliver the services that are required. I also point out that, in the years that the hospital was privatised, over the last decade, hospital funding in this country was cut by over $1 billion by the current Leader of the Opposition. It is no wonder that hospitals around the country, including the Modbury Hospital, saw a deterioration in the services they provide. Again, it has taken the Rudd government to reinstate that funding—and in fact increase it by 50 per cent.
These bills, as I said earlier on, are part of a range of reform measures that are required to ensure that into the future we have a health system that people around the country will benefit from, a health system that will be efficient for the Australian people and efficient for Australian taxpayers in that it is not wasteful. It is one of a number of measures. I understand that this is the first step to establishing an e-health records system around the country—again, something that is absolutely necessary in today’s modern society. We have said on many occasions in this place, in respect of a whole range of matters, that we have moved on since Federation. People in this country move around, from one state to another, on a regular basis. Their employment takes them from one place to another. Whether they are on vacation or whether they are studying, Australians move frequently. If people move frequently the best care we can give them is to ensure that the doctors who are treating them at the time have the most up-to-date and accurate records in respect of the health of those people—and that is exactly what this proposal begins to do. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (11.17 am)—I have some comments to make in relation to both bills. The Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and the Healthcare Identifiers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010 seek to establish a single national healthcare identifier system for patients, healthcare providers and healthcare provider organisations. This system will not only facilitate more reliable healthcare related communications and the management of patient information but provide the core infrastructure to develop a national e-health records system.

I would like to thank the members for their contributions to the debate on these bills. E-health has a crucial role to play in ensuring the success of the healthcare reform agenda which the government is currently undertaking. The development of a national e-health system will improve safety and quality and patient convenience by ensuring that the right people have access to the right information at the right time.

Governments across the country have invested considerable amounts of time, money and energy in developing e-health initiatives, but until we have a national healthcare identifier system in place there will continue to be a barrier to developing a well connected, national healthcare system. The Healthcare Identifiers Service will establish the infrastructure necessary to support future e-health development by overcoming the fragmented approach that currently exists when it comes to identifying patients and healthcare providers. Combined with a national authentication system, and the appropriate regulatory support, healthcare identifiers will deliver the access and identity requirements critical to ensuring confidence in the way a patient’s health information is handled in an electronic environment.

The bills seek to limit the use of healthcare identifiers to activities regularly associated with the delivery of healthcare, including for communication and information management purposes and other specified purposes, and to establish privacy protections to support the appropriate handling of healthcare identifiers. The government is committed to working with a broad range of patients and healthcare providers to educate them about the healthcare identifiers and the benefits associated with them.

I am aware that there is considerable community and stakeholder interest in this legislation and in the government’s e-health agenda more broadly. That is why the government conducted two rounds of public consultation on the policy proposals and...
draft exposure legislation in 2009. To further allow as much consultation as possible on these bills the government has referred both bills to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for consideration.

Healthcare identifiers are an essential building block to developing a national e-health system, which will over time improve the way in which healthcare is delivered in this country. This will help to ensure that as a nation we are in a position to continue delivering quality health care to all Australians. I commend the bills to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (11.20 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

HEALTHCARE IDENTIFIERS (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (11.21 am)—I do not propose to make any further comments. I rely upon the comments I made in relation to the previous bill, the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Parliamentary Secretary for Health) (11.21 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AND GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS MEASURES) BILL 2010

Cognate bill:

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AND GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE (SAFETY LEVIES) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Mr Martin Ferguson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (11.23 am)—I say at the outset that the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010, though minor in what it is proposing, affects two extraordinarily important areas—Australia’s economy and the future treatment of greenhouse gas emissions. The oil and gas industry in Australia, particularly the offshore oil and gas industry, has been one of the extraordinary success stories for this economy and an area which has seen enormous investment and development. It is no exaggeration to say in relation to offshore oil and gas, particularly off Western Australia but also off Victoria and parts of South Australia, that there will be literally tens of billions of dollars in investment in this industry over the next five to 10 years.

It is our goal as a nation not only to see this gas exploited for the economic wealth
that it brings to this nation and the jobs that it creates for all Australians but also to see particularly the liquid natural gas industry in Australia developed as a clean energy alternative for the rest of the world. We all know that greenhouse gas emissions have to be cut and that Australia needs to play an important role in that. The coalition has a direct action plan which is able to do that without decimating jobs in industry in Australia and without causing enormous increases in the price of energy, particularly electricity, for the households of Australia. Part of that solution, as well as capturing carbon, lies in using gas as an energy source here in Australia. But, as we know, the issues in relation to greenhouse gas emissions do not just relate to one country. What is emitted by one country is shared by the rest of the world. So it is important that we as a nation are able to ensure that we have the opportunity to be the supplier of a clean energy source to the rest of the world.

Natural gas is a transitional energy to a zero-emission future. It emits half to one-third of the emissions of a coal fired power station when used to generate electricity through a combined cycle electricity plant. Also, for those countries who do not have abundant coal reserves, such as Japan, it is a very important part of their electricity generation industry. So Australia can play a major role in the global reduction of greenhouse gases through the development and export of liquefied natural gas.

The second area which is also covered by these amendments is the actual storage of greenhouse gas emissions. It is something both the government and the coalition support very strongly. In my time as the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources I worked with the industry to realise the potential of clean coal and also, more importantly, carbon capture and storage. Without carbon capture and storage there is no future for coal as a domestic energy source for our power stations in Australia as we move forward to a lower emission economy. The capture of that gas, the technology that goes with it and ultimately the storage of carbon dioxide in reservoirs both onshore and offshore will be a critical part of our low-emission future. This legislation touches on that as well and the way in which we are able to regulate that not only to ensure that the storage of that gas is possible but also to assure the community that the processes of the storage of that gas mean that that gas remains where it is supposed to be for decades and centuries to come.

I would like to address the two parts of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010. Firstly, in relation to offshore petroleum measures, much of the reform of regulation surrounding offshore petroleum resources began under the previous coalition government. In fact, it was begun by me as the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources. The coalition also provided a number of incentives to encourage exploration and investment in that sector which we as a country need to ensure that not only the current known reserves of oil and particularly natural gas are exploited but also the exploration for new reserves of natural gas continues.

We all know that there are extensive traditional reserves of natural gas in Australia, particularly off Western Australia. Some 200 trillion cubic feet of known reserves exist off Australia. The exciting prospect is that onshore, particularly in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales, there may be an equivalent or even higher level of reserves of coal seam gas that will see Australia more than abundantly self-sufficient in these gases and, as I said, able to supply a growing world need for clean energy well into this century. Those incentives and the encouragement we
gave for exploration are vital to the continuing expansion of the oil and gas industry in Australia. We are therefore pleased to support the measures that have the support of stakeholders and ensure the regulation of offshore petroleum activities is safe, effective and sustainable.

The coalition supports the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010 and is happy for that to proceed unamended. We acknowledge that there is a minor technical amendment that stems from an amendment to the act late last year. The changes will provide transitional arrangements retrospectively from 1 January 2010 until 31 December 2012 to impose a safety case levy for designated coastal waters. The Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2009 commenced the phase-out of the pipeline safety management plan levy and its replacement by a safety case levy covering pipelines to facilitate pipelines being covered under safety regulations in future, rather than under pipeline regulations. This is part of the harmonisation of this array of levies and regulations that exists across the industry and across states. Australia needs to have a very harmonised and national approach not only to the way we administer and apply these levies but also to the regulations that go with them so that, regardless of whether you are operating in the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, Western Australia or Victoria, there is a single set of rules. It was intended that the state and territory regulations would be amended to correspond with the Commonwealth legislation. Quite frankly, that just makes good sense. This has not occurred and, as a result, some safety levy payments due to NOPSA may not be collectable until corresponding amendments are in place. The current safety levies bill seeks to address these issues with transitional measures. As I say, the coalition does not oppose this bill.

However, the so-called miscellaneous measures bill that is being considered cognitively with the safety levies bill is not as straightforward. My colleagues in Western Australia are particularly concerned with some aspects of this bill. It seems only reasonable that, with two-thirds of Australia’s offshore oil and gas resources and over 80 per cent of offshore titles being based in Western Australia, this parliament, this government and the industry as a whole should take a reasonable interest in, and pay reasonable respect to, those concerns. We, as a result, have significant concerns about the miscellaneous measures bill, including the fact that there has not been adequate consultation and that the negotiations have not been completed on it. We think there is room for further examination to ensure that all stakeholder concerns are addressed. There is no rush for this legislation. To address those concerns, from my experience as the Chairman of the Ministerial Council on Energy and of the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources, it is important that we get these things right. If we do not get them right at the outset, inevitably the actual execution of them—the putting in place of their administration and the collection of the levies associated with them—grinds to a halt. As such, and because of our concerns about the failure to complete stakeholder consultation and our desire to ensure that this is right before it is implemented, we have sought to have the miscellaneous measures bill referred to a Senate committee for inquiry. That bill will be examined by the Senate Economics Legislation Committee, which is due to report back to the Senate by 23 April 2010.

Of preliminary concern, particularly to my Western Australian colleagues, is the first item of this bill, which seeks to remove the
payments to the states and Northern Territory. Part 1 of schedule 1 of the miscellaneous bill allows for the Commonwealth to retain industry registration fees under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas (Registration Fees) Act 2006 rather than returning them to the states and Northern Territory for the purpose of funding the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator. The operation of that offshore regulator is crucial not only to ensure, as I say, the safe operation of this industry but also to ensure public confidence in the way this industry operates.

We have unfortunately seen a number of instances in recent years that have caught the public attention. We saw a fire on Veranus Island, which not only crippled the gas supply from that island but had a flow-on effect on energy users right down the Western Australian coast and certainly to the southern part of Fremantle and all points in between, as well as inland in the minerals province. We saw a fire in the gas plant there and we obviously need to ensure that is not repeated. The role of NOPSA and of this new regulator that is being established is to ensure that there is sufficient oversight and regulation of the operation of these oil and gas plants to ensure that these sorts of instances do not recur. It is impossible to prevent accidents completely, but there is the opportunity to prevent many of them, so the operation of this new regulatory body is crucially important. It is also important that the states are able to contribute to that; hence, our concerns about the failure of this money to be returned to the states and territories.

The explanatory memorandum to the bill states that the retention of registration fees is estimated to result in a decrease in expenses to the Commonwealth of around $15.3 million in 2010-11 and $7.7 million in 2011-12. The Western Australian government indicates, though, that this number is actually $15.3 million in an adverse hit on the Western Australian budget in 2010-11. The federal government has stated that it intends to retain the money collected under the registration fees act for the period 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2011 for the purposes of funding the establishment of the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator. That is crucially important, as I mentioned. There are roles that need to be played by these bodies, and NOPSA, and now the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator, have a crucial role not only in the gas industry but, as we have seen recently, in investigation of the oil leak that occurred off the north-west coast.

We do have concerns that the federal government would be moving through this bill to hold fees for the establishment of a National Offshore Petroleum Regulator given that at least one state government—that is, the Western Australian government—has concerns about the proposal. I am sure that Western Australia’s concerns in relation to the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator can be addressed but we need to see full and frank consultation on this. We need to see discussion, explanations and negotiations take place to ensure that this National Offshore Petroleum Regulator has the support not only of the biggest state in regard to the oil and gas industry but also of a state which obviously plays a part in our national system. We need to ensure, in fact, that all states agree with the establishment and operation of the NOPR.

The Western Australian government has been quite open in expressing its concerns about the Productivity Commission’s recommendations and the implementation of their recommendations and, given that Western Australia’s budget is going to be hit by this measure, identified in this bill as savings to the Commonwealth, it makes sense that its concerns are fully addressed before the passage of this piece of legislation. As the Western Australian Department of Mines and Pe-
The federal government has announced that it will proceed with the recommendation of the Productivity Commission and that it will establish the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator, to commence in 2012—still at least two years away. The minister indicated in his second reading speech that he does not expect to introduce the legislation to enable the establishment of the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator until 2011—again, a year away from now—and that would only be following further discussions with the Ministerial Council on Minerals and Petroleum Resources. The question must therefore be asked: why should the parliament, before that time, approve these changes in fee structures, particularly when they have a $15 million per annum negative impact on the Western Australian budget and when this parliament has not considered the legislation to actually establish the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator? That is a long-winded way, perhaps, of saying there is no rush for this legislation and that there is ample time to ensure that the spirit of the agreements is adhered to—that, in fact, we see full consultation and much better cooperation in relation to the establishment of the NOPR.

Given the concerns of the Western Australian government as a key stakeholder in the NOPR, we believe this bill should not be supported at this point in its current form. The coalition, as has always been the case in our term in opposition, is prepared to sit down with the minister and discuss the matter further, thus ensuring that this bill is optimal and that it has the support of all states as well as the Commonwealth. There was limited consultation on the specifics of this bill and limited opportunity for concerns to be addressed before the legislation was introduced.

While many of the other amendments in this bill are of a technical nature, I note that the Western Australian government has also made some comments to the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism about other aspects of the bill. These include aspects relating to the functions of the safety authority, issues of natural justice in relation to property rights and the proposal of changes to the duties of titleholders. All these issues are important and all these issues must be fully explored. I trust that with further consultation these issues can be clarified and resolved to the satisfaction of all stakeholders and I urge the government to ensure that this occurs before the Senate considers this bill. Given this bill has the greatest impact in Western Australia, it makes sense for the Commonwealth government to work with the Western Australian government on a way forward on this bill and also in the establishment of the NOPR and associated funding arrangements. It is premature for the parliament to approve this component of the legislation in advance of further progress on the establishment of the NOPR through the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petro-
leum Resources. Hopefully, these concerns can be resolved with further discussion in this forum and the parliament can consider a comprehensive plan, including the funding arrangements for any national offshore petroleum regulator.

As I say, the coalition supports the establishment of the regulator. We have a long and proud history of ensuring that there is a national approach to the way in which we administer and regulate one of the most important primary industries in Australia. The oil and gas industry is an industry which has, as I say, made an enormous contribution to our economy, will make an even bigger contribution to our economy, will provide jobs and wealth to many Australians and will provide clean energy to the rest of the world. It is crucially important, therefore, as we put this legislation in place, that we have the full support of the states. It is the coalition’s view that the second part of this bill should be delayed until that consultation has taken place.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (11.45 am)—I would like to take the opportunity to speak to these amendments and also comment on the broader climate change issue. My electorate of Corangamite will be one of the areas most affected by climate change, and that is why I believe so strongly that we need to act now.

I congratulate the Minister for Resources and Energy for his amendments in the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010. The bill will amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006. These amendments are minor policy and technical changes which will pave the way for the National Offshore Petroleum Regulator. This will improve the operations of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority. There is no adverse effect on industry and there are no extra costs to industry.

This bill will also simplify the safety regime for titleholders. It will remove direct responsibility from a titleholder for facilities which it has no control over. It will ensure that offences that have occurred can be more successfully prosecuted by making them offences of strict liability. This bill will cause no adverse impact on any regional people, and this is great news for the people of my electorate and especially those who work in the offshore petroleum industry.

I have spoken in this place on several occasions on climate change related issues. I have done this because I believe we need to act decisively on climate change and we need to act now. There is the likelihood that some greenhouse storage activities will happen in my region. This could be an industry in my region that would provide people with well-paid employment and for those reasons I am hoping that it will be successful. This bill will help to make sure this industry is a success into the future.

This industry is very important to my region’s local economy. The Otway Basin is an important gas production area for the south-eastern gas markets of Australia. As at December 2009 the Otway Basin’s petroleum fields provided approximately 23.4 per cent of eastern Australia’s conventional gas production; proved and probable reserves of 1,197 petajoules, which is 17.8 per cent of Victoria’s conventional gas reserves and 14.8 per cent of eastern Australia’s reserves; 17.1 per cent of eastern Australia’s total gas production of both conventional natural gas and coal seam gas and 3.5 per cent of eastern Australia’s total gas reserves; and some 70,000 tonnes or 3.1 per cent of Australia’s liquefied petroleum gas production. The basin also produces a small amount of condensate—708,000 barrels, or 1.2 per cent of
Australian production. This is a significant contribution from my region to a very important industry for Australia.

The Otway Basin has three major gas projects which all transfer offshore gas to onshore treatment plants. The largest development in the Otway Basin is the Otway gas project. It is a $1.1 billion development situated about 70 kilometres south of Port Campbell. We need to encourage these developments so we can act on climate change now. I would not be doing my job for the people of Corangamite if I were not talking about industries that are so important to my region. That is why I regularly speak on all climate related bills, particularly those that can help reduce our carbon footprint.

My electorate will be very severely affected by climate change if we do not take decisive action. I have mentioned before in the House but I think I need to emphasise again the problems in my electorate. The Great Ocean Road, the Surf Coast and parts of the Bellarine Peninsula will all be adversely threatened by rising sea levels. Large parts of my electorate do rely on the tourism economy. The Great Ocean Road is an icon of Australia and a key component of the local tourism industry. This would be devastated if we did not act on climate change and the real prospect of sea level rise came to fruition. Large parts of the Bellarine Peninsula, a key part of my seat, are very low-lying and will be inundated if there is sea level rise. There would be devastation over large inland areas of my electorate caused by drought activity and the like. The small borough of Queenscliff would be very adversely affected by sea level rise. Many jobs will be lost to the local economy if we do not take decisive action. Many parts of Ocean Grove and the Bellarine Peninsula would be affected.

We do need to take very decisive steps to reduce Australia’s carbon footprint. I think offshore production of gas and liquefied assets and, ultimately, storage of greenhouse gases in those fields can provide a very significant opportunity for us to reduce our carbon footprint. This is in many regards a new and emerging industry and we do need to take the necessary steps to support the growth and development of Australia’s very, very significant gas reserves.

Minister Martin Ferguson has been a passionate advocate for Australia to take advantage of all of the opportunities—whether in Western Australia, Queensland or Victoria—to exploit the landscape and gas reserves we have and to store greenhouse gases into the future. That is why I believe that these small but important amendments are very important, particularly in regional economies like mine and in Western Australia and Queensland where we have very significant opportunities to grow a very significant industry and to substantially reduce our greenhouse gas footprint. These small changes are significant and they will pave the way for future growth and development of this industry to ensure that the necessary regulations are in place so that we do undertake these activities in a very safe and sound way. I publicly acknowledge the contribution that Minister Ferguson is making in this area. He certainly is a very thoughtful minister and someone who is prepared to take the necessary steps to help grow this very, very important industry into Australia’s future. I commend these bills to the House.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (11.54 am)—We have two bills here that are in cognate, the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010 and Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2009. As the opposition spokesman on these matters has al-
ready said, the coalition sees merit in the legislation proposing some changes in the offshore safety arrangements but expresses concern in regard to the so-called miscellaneous measures—the process by which usually governments slip something under the guard of those who are looking at the principal legislation.

These, of course, are issues of grave concern to persons representing Western Australia and the areas such as mine in the electorate of O’Connor. It is all contained in the third paragraph of the second reading speech of the Minister for Resources and Energy on the introduction of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010. It is quite interesting to read the second paragraph. It says:

It is nevertheless an important bill as it progresses the government’s intention to establish a new National Offshore Petroleum Regulator. That is already covered by the acronym NOPR. That commences, according to the minister, on 1 January 2012. So what is the significance of these miscellaneous measures? They are to be found in the next paragraph of the minister’s second reading speech, in which it is said:

To this end, the bill introduces a measure by which the Commonwealth will retain the industry fees raised under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Registration Fees) Act 2006 in order to use this money for the establishment of a National Offshore Petroleum Regulator. This is another example we find of this government making promises to the community for delivery in a future parliament. It is now my strong view that by 2012 a coalition party will be the government here in Australia. But, irrespective of that, goodness knows what the make-up of the remaining members of the existing government might be in this House at that time.

What is the House deciding today—to take a significant amount of money? Thank you for the public servants who write the explanatory memorandum. They are not inclined towards spin; they try and tell us politicians the facts. They say under the heading, ‘Financial Impact Statement’:

The Bill includes minor policy and administrative changes which will have a slight financial effect on the Australian Government Budget.

Considering the size of it, I guess that is an accurate statement. I will come to the Western Australian budget, which is miniscule in comparison. I continue my reading from the explanatory memorandum:

The retention of the registration fees is estimated to result in a decrease in expenses—

for the Commonwealth—
of $15.3 million in 2010-11 and $7.7 million in 2011-12.

In other words, we have a fiddle by which the Western Australian government, which have just also had the bad news of a very significant drop in their share of GST, are being asked by this government to contribute one-third of the remainder so that it can keep some sort of wobbly promise on reforming the health system, presumably for the better but which is yet to be proven.

So here we are in this House being asked to authorise a reduction in the revenues of the state of Western Australia to ease the Commonwealth’s efforts in creating a national offshore petroleum regulator. The Commonwealth government said that it is a good idea, and the coalition does not argue with that proposal. But now state governments are going to pay for the privilege at a point in time when we do not have a national offshore petroleum regulator—and $15 million is a significant amount of money to be removed from the coffers of the Western Australian government, struggling as it is to
meet a significant amount of the infrastructure requirements that apply to the development of the arrangements involved in Gorgon gas and others. In my electorate—as it will be after the next election—people of the town of Kalgoorlie are very anxious that a rail-to-road transport hub should be developed within the town site areas of Kalgoorlie. Why? Because that would considerably shorten the journey that trucks must take—remembering there is no significant rail service north of Perth on the way to the Pilbara. There would be a considerable shortcut if certain infrastructure were improved to interconnect the roads that exist already with the north-west highway—this is the inland road—and if 100-odd kilometres of road were sealed it would be to the economic benefit of all Australians. Trucks could be offloaded in Kalgoorlie from the rail system and continue their journey up a sealed road to the Pilbara and, if necessary, onwards to Browse and other localities.

So here is the state government seeking to do that sort of infrastructure development—it is not cheap; 160 kilometres is quite an extensive length of road—but the outcome would be a huge profit in every regard for the Australian nation in reducing the cost of this form of infrastructure, such as for Gorgon and others, and opening up further opportunities to the eastern states to participate in the supply of equipment and other items that will be required, which, considering the location, can be shipped in from overseas countries. These are opportunities in which the Western Australian government can help out, and I can assure you that if the amounts of money mentioned here—$20-odd million—were applied to that road it would be an excellent start. But here we are being asked to take money off Western Australia for an organisation that does not exist, may never exist and, according to the speech by the Minister for Resources and Energy, is not expected to be in operation until 1 January 2012. I understand that the coalition—with the support of other senators, I am sure—will see this matter go to a Senate inquiry. But no case has been put by the government to grab this cash at this particular time, and I have some doubts in this regard as to whether the Western Australian government could disband the authority within its mines department that delivers this inspection capability at present.

The member for Corangamite made some reference to his own state and, by the way, spent a substantial portion of his speech on climate change. If you can reduce the travel distance as I have already described by way of a transport link and a transport hub out of Kalgoorlie, there must be a reduction in the emissions involved in transferring the goods over a longer distance. It is very significant. As things stand now, the east-west railway line delivers into the Perth metropolitan area and then the trucks take off from there into the north, when in fact the carriages could be dropped off at Kalgoorlie, the semitrailers unloaded at a proper hub and then the prime movers could move in and go straight up the inland road, provided that the connecting link is available and they are not smashing their trucks up on the original standard. Those things need money, and it is inappropriate therefore for us to be considering legislation that reduces the capacity of the Western Australian government to do that sort of good work.

But there are other interesting factors, and the member for Corangamite raised the issue of climate change. Apparently, the benefits to his electorate will arise from placing an emissions trading tax on the very industries we are choosing to speak about today because they are carbon based industries. But, more importantly, as I mentioned in a doorstop interview this morning, the issue of a great big tax has been widened with the coa-
lition’s quite proper initiative to give ade-
quately support to women who wish to have a
family and who must lose their employment
income during that period. Marital leave and
maternity leave is a good process, but some
people have tried to talk about the taxes as
both being the same. They are not. The pro-
posal from our leader, Mr Abbott, is one
whereby the profit of certain big companies
will be subject to an income tax, a tax you
only pay when you are making a profit. The
emissions trading tax is a tax you pay even if
you are going broke—that is irrefutable—and
it is why the coalition, under Peter
Costello, got rid of sales tax. It was because
that was a tax you had to pay when you were
going broke. The GST gives business a re-
bate on such taxes as it flows through to the
consumer. So this is pretty interesting.

There is another issue relevant to repre-
senting the interests of Western Australia.
Two-thirds of Australia’s offshore oil and gas
resources and over 80 per cent of Australia’s
offshore titles are based off the coast of
Western Australia. So this is legislation that
almost exclusively covers Western Australia,
notwithstanding the benefits that will arise
with coal seam gas in Queensland and, as the
member for Corangamite has said, in Bass
Strait, but they are minuscule by comparison.
Therefore Western Australian representatives
have a big responsibility to put the argument
on behalf of their constituencies.

I was in discussion the other day with the
member for Canning, who is a member of
the coalition and a man of great commitment
to the issues I have just raised. He will be
opposed in the forthcoming election by the
state member for Armadale—not the retired
state member for Armadale, but the incum-
bent state member for Armadale and one-
time minister in the Gallop and Carpenter
governments. In other words, she still has an
office provided by the WA taxpayer, she still
has her income and, on retirement—

presumably just before the election—she will
have a very substantial superannuation pay-
out of an order I wish we federal members
could get.

Mr Shorten—When are you going to re-
tire? It’s a bit rich for you to talk about super,
but don’t let the legislation get in your way.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH
Adams)—Order! I ask members to come to
order and I ask the member for O’Connor to
come back to the legislation before the
House.

Mr TUCKEY—By the way, I will make a
loss on it and I am not hanging around here
to get it. When we have these sorts of con-
tests it is very interesting to see how attitudes
change. The present state government is a
Liberal-National—‘coalition’ is hardly the
right word—group who I am pleased to say
is getting on pretty well. It is over there mak-
ing a fuss about this matter.

During the period when the member for
Armadale was in government, she on occa-
sion after occasion complained about the
treatment that the Western Australian gov-
ernment got from the Howard government.
On 29 August 2001, 20 May 2003, 29 June
2004, 8 May 2005 and 25 August 2005 she
was on the record quite properly arguing
the case for WA. But there is a significance
about those dates: there is no such matter on
the record after 2007. Apparently since there
has been a change of government in this
place that member no longer thinks she has a
responsibility to argue the case for Western
Australia, as the incumbent member for
Canning certainly does. Of course we had a
huge debate over the Bunbury highway and
her original position, as a minister for trans-
port, in refusing an offer from the Howard
government of $170 million to start that pro-
ject. All credit to the member for Canning.

These are most important issues when one
looks at the particular issue under debate.
That issue is one relative to whether an otherwise unexceptional piece of legislation can result in a clawback of money from the government of Western Australia, who has been doing a pretty good job in this regard. I want to talk a little about the relevance of its good work to the oil and gas industry. Western Australia, as other states, relies heavily on payroll tax as a source of revenue. I do not have to convince the House that, when a major project employing 10,000 people—of which we can be very grateful—is in progress, payroll tax is significantly enhanced, for instance in Western Australia.

Yet the previous state government was unable to secure for Western Australia the Inpex development from Browse, because they could not make up their mind where they might put a hub on the 6,000-kilometre coastline that exists between Broome and Darwin. They could not find a place. Colin Barnett, the incumbent Premier, fixed that up in no time. The interesting point is that the Japanese group obtaining gas from adjoining deposits was prepared to come ashore in the Kimberley in Western Australia and do its development. The payroll tax revenue from the wages it would have paid in such a circumstance would probably build a hospital in WA. It certainly would have funded the road that is essential to shortening the transport distances to that wonderful area of development in Australia and to making eastern states manufacturers more competitive with overseas manufacturers, as an example outside my state.

The previous state government could not do it, so Inpex has gone to Darwin. Good luck to Darwin. It is not a very good environmental outcome. There are huge lengths of pipeline undersea, high-pressure requirements, more emissions and more emissions in the actual manufacture of the pipeline—all bad things. More particularly, the traditional landowners missed out on a billion bucks. It will not go to Indigenous people in Darwin because the deal was already done. We have a government in WA who this government believes cannot do the job. This government would like to take the responsibility off the WA government, when after a very short period of time we now have the major projects coming to Western Australia.

Ms Saffin (Page) (12.14 pm)—I speak in support of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010 and the accompanying Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010. The government is establishing a national offshore petroleum regulator to operate from 1 January 2012, and it is important to have the legislation passed to get the necessary legwork done in time and to allow for the retention of the funds from 1 July this year. It will be these funds that will fund the national offshore petroleum regulator. The objective of the main bill is to establish the regulator, and the aims are as follows: to strengthen the role of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority, to make clarifications on how titleholder provisions apply where titles are held jointly by two or more titleholders, to make clear a titleholder’s responsibility under the occupational health and safety provisions of the act and to make technical amendments to achieve a more enforceable regulatory regime and update the act in a few areas.

These amendments are minor policy and technical changes which, most importantly, pave the way for the establishment of the regulator. This will improve the ability of the authority to regulate the structural integrity of facilities, wells and well-related equipment, and it will clarify the way the provisions regarding titleholders relate to situations where title is held by two or more titleholders.
There are no adverse effects on industry from these bills and no additional costs as such. Currently, all the money the Commonwealth receives from industry fees under the act and related acts is paid to the states and the Northern Territory. In order to fund the establishment of the regulator, the government will retain the fees paid under the registration fees act. The minister will be reviewing the fees collected under the act and associated acts to ensure that the states and the Northern Territory will be able to continue carrying out regulatory functions on behalf of the Commonwealth until such time as the regulator is established.

The augmentation of the authority’s functions is to ensure that it can effectively and fully regulate the structural integrity of petroleum and greenhouse gas facilities, wells and well-related equipment, even where certain structures such as pipelines and wells may not have people at or near them for extended periods of time. These amendments do not extend the authority’s role beyond that of an occupational health and safety regulator.

The bills provide clarity in relation to administrative arrangements for and treatment of obligations of titleholders in situations where title is held by two or more of them. They also provide that a titleholder’s duties under the occupational health and safety provisions of the act relate only to wells. Under the safety regime, a range of people have duties to ensure worker health and safety, but critical information about the well and reservoir is held only by the titleholder. However, the amendments remove any possibility that a titleholder could be held directly responsible for facilities which it has no control over.

The changes to certain offence provisions in the act which relate to titleholders are to fully prosecuted by making these offences ones of strict liability. As they currently stand, the provisions require intent to be proved in order for a prosecution to be successful. This is very difficult to do given the nature and remoteness of offshore operations in addition to the proliferation of multiple titleholder arrangements. The amendments remove the need to prove intent. In line with government policy regarding strict liability, these changes are being made to offences with physical elements.

I want to make a general comment about the issue of strict liability. While I support these changes and understand the need in this situation—it is to do with occupational health and safety, which has to be a primary concern—I retain an apprehension, if you like, about strict liability in general. It is probably my lawyer’s background there. But I do understand that in this situation, when we are dealing with occupational health and safety, it is important—understanding how it works and how it operates in this particular situation.

Other amendments include a minor correction updating the act to reflect recent changes in regulations and providing further transitional arrangement in the safety levies act to allow further time for the amendment of state and Northern Territory legislation.

I will turn to schedule 1 of the miscellaneous measures bill; there are certain parts in it that I will make some comments on. Part 2 provides the authority with a clarified role and some strengthened functions, and this is important. These amendments make sure that the authority’s existing functions, relating to the structural integrity and the soundness, strength and stability of offshore petroleum facilities, also expressly cover wells and well-related equipment. They also expressly give the authority an ability to examine non-occupational health and safety aspects of
structural integrity, and that is important. In ensuring such facilities and structures are safe when people engaged in petroleum activities are at or near these facilities and structures, the authority may need to take into account aspects of structural integrity which may not necessarily be directly related to occupational health and safety but which are nevertheless important to consider in assessing the integrity of the facility or structure. This is largely because certain structures, such as wells and pipelines, do not usually have people constantly near them. That is a good thing; however, when people are near them, they need to be safe. However, to be clear, these amendments do not extend the authority’s role beyond that of a health and safety regulator. They just give them the power and the authority to do what is necessary so that they can carry out their role as regulator.

I turn to the provisions covering multiple titleholders. Part 3 clarifies how the act applies when a petroleum or greenhouse gas title is owned by two or more titleholders, also known as multiple titleholders. This is common in the offshore resources sector. The amendments set out that, where multiple titleholders are making an application or request or giving a nomination or notice, they must nominate one of the titleholders to act on behalf of the others to make these applications. This part also makes clear that, where a title is owned by multiple titleholders while legal obligations under the act apply to each and every holder of a title, such obligations may be acquitted by any one of the holders. It is important to bring that clarification into the act.

Part 4 makes a number of offence provisions which apply to titleholders where the offences comprise physical elements only—the offences of strict liability that I talked about but for physical elements only. These provisions relate to the physical doing or not doing of an act—so by commission or omission—and relate to provisions that require information and record keeping or require compliance with expected work practices or with the regulator’s directions. Given the nature and remoteness of offshore petroleum activities, it is not always possible to have regulatory staff constantly and comprehensively monitor the activities of companies. Regulatory staff are thus dependent on the titleholder informing them of compliance with requirements and directions. Making these offences ones of strict liability removes the requirement to prove that the titleholder intended to do or not to do a certain act. In a situation that is about safety and where safety is paramount, it is absolutely essential that things be kept in pristine condition to minimise any damage or injury. It is very difficult to prove intention in these circumstances, as we know, particularly where there are more often than not multiple titleholders and, therefore, this serves to frustrate compliance efforts resulting in the need for these amendments.

These are very important amendments. Even though I said they are minor and technical, they are nonetheless very important changes to the act because they are about improving health and safety, improving compliance, ensuring that those are of paramount concern and having the regulator that can deal with those issues. I did not know a lot about this industry some years ago. I think as Australians and particularly as parliamentarians it behoves us to know about the industry. It is very important to Australia and the Australian economy. It was during my time working and living in Timor-Leste that I got to know a lot more about this industry, which I found very beneficial and useful in the role that I am playing today as an elected member. With those comments, I commend the bills.
Ms MARINO (Forrest) (12.26 pm)—I rise to speak on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010 and the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010. These two bills implement policy and technical amendments to the existing offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas storage legislation, much of which began under the coalition government. The safety levies bill provides transitional arrangements retrospectively from 1 January 2010 until 31 December 2012 to impose a safety case levy in relation to designated coastal waters. This transitional period will give the states and the Northern Territory time to implement corresponding amendments and for the safety case levy to be collected through the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority in the interim.

The coalition supports the transitional measures in the safety levies bill. However, the miscellaneous measures bill contains a number of amendments which are of major concern to Western Australia, to Western Australian members of parliament and, most significantly, to the Western Australian government and people of our great state. Part 1 of schedule 1 will see the Commonwealth retain industry registration fees from 1 July 2010 under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Registration Fees) Act 2006. For practical purposes, the retention of the registration fees by the federal Labor government will see $15.3 million removed from the WA state budget in 2010-11 and $7.7 million removed in 2011-12. It appears to us that this is just the latest federal Labor government attack on the WA economy as a cash cow to help pay off the government’s debt and deficit and, by default, prop up the economies of the failed Labor state governments.

We are very well aware of the strength of the resources and agricultural sectors in our state of Western Australia. Madam Deputy Speaker Moylan, as you would know very well from your electorate, WA produces 40 per cent of the nation’s wheat and exports 60 per cent of the nation’s wheat, providing 35 per cent of Australia’s export wealth. Agricultural exports have been a key driver and a very major factor in keeping Australia from recession. The Labor government is expecting WA to keep delivering to the federal coffers via the resources and agricultural sectors in spite of providing a mere seven per cent of recent infrastructure spending in WA itself. This compromises the very growth the federal government is relying on to drive the national economy.

My electorate, the south-west area of Western Australia alone, needs at least $750 million for immediate infrastructure to deal with capacity and productivity constraints in roads, rail and port facilities. This comes on top of plans by the government to strip $443 million from WA’s share of the GST funding next year while—again—the failed Labor state of New South Wales will be rewarded with an additional $277 million, and Victoria with an additional $223 million.

Recent data quoted by the WA state Treasurer shows that WA contributes $8 billion more to Commonwealth revenues each year through company tax, personal income tax and petroleum revenues than it receives back from the Commonwealth in grants and other expenditure benefits. As we know, WA has 10.4 per cent of the population but also has the highest growth rate in Australia of over three per cent—well above other states. By majority, this is driven by the major resources sector—something that I believe is not clearly recognised or valued by the federal Labor government. This is why I am also sure that the WA state Treasurer, Troy Buswell, will make very strong representa-
tions to the Commonwealth Grants Commission, given the effects of strong population growth on the state’s capital works program.

The long-awaited Henry tax review that the Labor government is failing to release—at least prior to the election, it seems—proposes to scrap state based mining royalties and replace them with a federal resources tax. We in Western Australia are very aware that these royalties are really critical to ongoing development of local mining communities in our resource-driven state.

The next attack on the WA economy by the federal Labor government will come from the proposal to further strip the state of GST to fund the promise on the public hospital system. I note this has come under fire, as reported in the Age by two senior health leaders. John Deeble, the co-architect of Medicare, said the government’s $50 billion reform package ‘is largely spin’; and Professor David Pennington, who headed the National AIDS Taskforce, is quoted as saying, ‘The plan would leave many hospitals in dire straits’. I also note that Ken Baxter, the former head of the premiers’ departments in NSW and Victoria, has warned that GST would have to increase from 10 to 12½ per cent to pay for the Labor government’s health plan. The federal health minister has also agreed that tax increases may be necessary.

The resources sector is clearly a driving force in the Western Australian and Australian economies, and as this legislation will have a major impact on the Western Australian petroleum industry it will have a major impact on the WA economy. As the Deputy Director-General of the Western Australian Department of Mines and Petroleum, Stedman Ellis, stated in a presentation on 3 February 2010, ‘Petroleum projects cross boundaries from Commonwealth waters, state waters, islands and mainland areas, with industry most affected in WA.’

Approximately two-thirds—close to 70 per cent—of Australia’s offshore oil and gas resources and over 80 per cent of offshore titles are based off the coast of WA. Data from the Western Australian Department of Mines and Petroleum shows that the state’s petroleum sector grew in value by nine per cent to $21.3 billion in 2008-09. The total sales value of this sector, which includes crude oil, condensate, natural gas and LNG, represents around 30 per cent of the total value of WA’s resource industry. The estimated total value of WA’s minerals and petroleum resources sector for 2008-09 was $71.31 billion. Projected growth in global energy demands are at least 30 to 40 per cent by 2030, and that will increase this value.

We have all seen the $43 billion Gorgon project announcement off the coast of WA. It is Australia’s largest offshore LNG find, with an estimated economic life of at least 40 years and with construction due to start next year. And the historic North-West Shelf projects like Pluto, Wheatstone and Browse are significant contributors to the Western Australian economy.

The WA Department of Mines and Petroleum was recently asked to comment on the amendments included in this specific legislation. In their response they highlighted their very serious concerns relating to the establishment of a National Offshore Petroleum Regulator, and therefore cannot agree to the proposed legislative amendment for the Commonwealth to retain the registration fees. In addition, the loss of revenue for WA will come at a time when the state is being required to commit funding to infrastructure development for Gorgon and other major projects.

Western Australia also considers that the respective functions and powers of the joint
authority and designated authority need to be very clearly defined and should remain in the OPGGSA. There is concern that this amendment could diminish WA’s functions and powers as regulation changes have less stringent requirements compared to act amendments. However, the Western Australia Department of Mines and Petroleum is supportive of, and has previously recommended, the inclusion of non-OHS structural integrity of facilities and pipelines as part of NOPSA’s responsibilities.

The WA government, like the coalition, believes that there needs to be further consultation on this legislation—and we believe the Senate inquiry will expose further flaws within the legislation itself. Under a National Offshore Petroleum Regulator industry will pay additional costs to set up the NOPR and will maintain regulatory expertise in the Commonwealth and state regulators. The national regulatory models also remove two very important issues: the states’ facilitation role and the local knowledge from regulatory decisions, and will result in a split regulatory regime. Companies will have to deal with a statutory authority and not directly with ministers.

Given the significant impacts these implications will have, particularly on the Western Australian petroleum industry, I believe that the WA government and other stakeholders should be given the opportunity to put publicly their concerns on the record about the measures contained in this legislation through the Senate inquiry process. As I said earlier, the inquiry will more fully examine the immediate and longer term implications of the measures contained in this bill—something very dear to both your heart and mine, Madam Deputy Speaker Moylan, particularly from a Western Australian perspective.

**Mr Shorten** (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (12.37 pm)—I rise to support the legislation before the parliament, the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010 and the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010. There is no issue at work more important, in my experience, than workplace safety, and for the words I am going to give in support of this legislation I am indebted for the lessons of my time with the Australian Workers Union, particularly for the work of Dr Yossi Berger, David Healy, John Clarence, Stephen Price, Paul Howes, Cesar Melhem, Helmut Gries, Rod Currie, Jim Ward, and also Tony McDonald and George Parker, who both recently received well-deserved life memberships of the AWU. For me, the question of the simple things that we can do to ensure that workers on offshore platforms can go home safely to their families at the end of their shifts and rosters should always be at the heart of any debate that goes towards health and safety. We need to recognise that workplace fatalities that occur too often in Australian workplaces can be prevented—and I never use the word ‘accident’ when I refer to fatality or serious injury at work.

In my work I have, sadly, attended the funerals of men killed at work. They were not just miners killed by man-made tremors, factory workers killed by needless explosions and forestry workers hit by debris by explosions, but hydrocarbon workers burnt by negligent safety systems. Despite the best efforts of many—and I include the best efforts of this government and employers, unions and employees—there is still an endless list of sorrow and heartbreak. There is no consolation for the death of people at work,
in particular perhaps for the death of young people in the full bloom of their health. We all know that there is no consolation. None of us believe there is any hope, inspiration or usefulness in it at all. All we can do is try and learn from these tragedies and hope to prevent them occurring again.

The bills in this House today result from the government’s intention to establish a national offshore petroleum regulator from 1 January 2012 to strengthen the role of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority. NOPSA is something that I and those in the Labor Party from the Maritime Union of Australia, the AWU and other unions campaigned for. It took us 10 years of agitating to have the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority established in 2005. I regret to say that the previous government played games of hide-and-seek, of show-and-tell, of foot dragging and delay. As a direct result of these delays safety on offshore oil and gas rigs and construction projects over water was placed under pressure and we are now dealing with accidents and explosions.

Offshore facilities are inherently isolated and dangerous workplaces. There is a history of famous and not so famous tragedies on them, such as the Piper Alpha disaster in the United Kingdom and the BP Texas City disaster in 2005 which killed 15 people. The most recent event in Australia was at the Montara wellhead in the Timor Sea. It fortunately did not kill or injure anyone, but it did pollute the surrounding seas with oil. This incident is currently being investigated independently through the rigorous procedures established by this government and the relevant minister.

Under these bills, the government will retain fees raised under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Registration Fees) Act 2006 to provide establishment funding for the national offshore petroleum regulator. These amendments make sure that NOPSA’s existing functions relating to the structural integrity or the soundness, strength and stability of offshore petroleum facilities also expressly cover wells and well related equipment. They also expressly give them the ability to examine non-occupational health and safety aspects of structural integrity. Certain structures, like wells and pipelines, do not usually have people near them, but when they do they must be safe. This bill clarifies NOPSA’s powers to ensure the safety of workers.

The election of the Rudd government has seen a return of the importance of debate about occupational health and safety in this country. The past Liberal government did not seem to be greatly interested in talking about health and safety. There was much done to soften regulation, to reduce the power of watchdogs and, most importantly, to take the voice of workers out of the safety debate. There was plenty of vague speech of OH&S culture and safety management, of management of acceptable risk and risk assessments of the sort of management humbug that has seen people hurt in the past at work. They did not talk of the practicalities of keeping people safe, of the burning need to keep that principle at the heart of every workplace. There was little discussion of the laws and standards and the punishments for workplaces that put their employees’ lives in danger.

One thing that was not discussed was the need to talk to workers about it. That was a no-go zone; that was a taboo. I recall very clearly their ideological opposition to unions, as typified by the mindless zealousness that was Work Choices. It meant that all too often they could not bring themselves to discuss safety with the people who dealt with hazards every day. As Dr Berger has written:
It is difficult to achieve good occupational health and safety standards in a workplace atmosphere bristling with denial and a sense of unfairness.

If you look at the record of the 12 years of the Howard government, why did they abandon the farmers? Why did they let dangerous chemicals, such as parathion-ethyl, a close relation of sarin nerve gas, continue to pollute our crops until the union banned it? They killed off Worksafe Australia and dispersed 100 fine researchers who would never again be gathered to do the work that they did so well as a critical mass before they were removed.

We are returning some of that capacity through Safe Work Australia, and after a decade of neglect we are trying to bring health and safety back—a decade after those opposite put the wrecking ball through the lot. We are working with the states to harmonise national health and safety laws which will place an unqualified obligation on employers to provide a safe workplace and to enshrine the power for workers to stop unsafe work, a power currently only available to 14½ per cent of the Australian workforce.

We want to restore the requirement for employers to talk to employees about work related matters that affect their health and safety. This is common sense to me and it is common sense unless you still wear the Work Choices blinkers, as some opposite do. One thing this government is doing is listening to workers, because they are the ones who see the risks every day. The offshore workers, the ones I had the privilege of visiting and working with over 15 years, particularly those in Bass Strait, worked for 10 years to get NOPSA established. We are not blinded by ideology to the value of the years of learned experience in the workplaces and unions across Australia, to the people who heard the complaints and concerns of workers, who visited the sites and who tried to stop the injuries before they happened.

Whatever legislation we pass in this place and whatever good work is done by inspectors and regulators does not change the fact that safety in the workplace depends on us listening to workers. We need to ensure that every platform, every construction vessel and every pipe-laying barge has a strong OH&S committee and that each shift includes workers well versed in OH&S. They must be encouraged to report safety issues to management and to be included in discussions about safety. Risks taken for the sake of productivity should not be tolerated. We can and must do better. Zero harm is not a poster on a wall; it represents not just a desirable but a real and achievable outcome in the workplaces of this country.

The struggle for safer workplaces is one that will never end. We also need to act to ensure the gains made in the past and to improve safety in the future. I suggest that good health and safety offshore is often a struggle of memory against forgetting and of remembering the lessons learned and the lives lost. It should be a struggle against the slow spread of complacency and the temptation to take shortcuts. These bills are a small step towards improving the chances that workers in the offshore hydrocarbon and petroleum industries will end their careers alive, with their limbs intact and with the ability to enjoy their retirement.

But it would be remiss of me if I did not reiterate on the record that this bill, as with all safety legislation, has no relevance without effective, relevant and accurate inspections and very effective OH&S processes at the site. The former means that we need an experienced and well-supported inspectorate which must be encouraged to regularly inspect for OH&S standards as if their family were working there, not with an eye for not disrupting business. The latter observation about effective safety processes at site means that we must dispense with the blind faith in...
the regular nonsense that cultural change will suffice. We must dispense with the nonsense that can blind people to the fact that more and more risk is tolerated for the sake of productivity.

I have seen firsthand the aftermath of OH&S tragedy, where it is admitted with hindsight that plenty of shortcuts were taken by everybody but tolerated because of the various levels of denial. I have seen all too often the astonishment of the distressed manager. Again I am grateful for Dr Yossi Berger, from whom I will quote: ‘The astonished managers have the following or similar expressions of surprise after the tragedy: “I would never have thought”; “Not in my wildest dreams”; “That was totally unexpected”; “Who would’ve imagined?”; “I’d never have expected”; “I can’t imagine why anyone would do that”; “How could you possibly see this happening?”’. These are all recorded instances after fatality or amputation.

Is it appropriate? Is it legitimate? Is it fair and natural to express astonishment at the death or maiming of workers. I suggest it is not. I think it is very important that the regulator, with its new areas in the new legislation, should recognise that we need to take careful note of the opinions and experiences of people working in the offshore industry. The presence of a board alone will not make workers safer. I suggest, for example, an examination of the age of the helicopter fleet currently bringing in and taking workers and material from platforms in the offshore industry. Is the helicopter fleet that serves the Australian offshore industry amongst the 22 or 25 offshore oil production fields around the world one of the oldest helicopter fleets in the world, and does this mean that we are heading for disasters that are not yet being acted upon and, indeed, may not likely be acted upon with these changes?

Finally, I also note for the new regulator the benefits of creating a small team of experienced workers or ex-workers—perhaps even the troublemakers—to promote the bad news, to act like OH&S ambassadors or bad-news officers all around all offshore facilities. Sharing information like that would be invaluable. In modern organisations it is always easier to get promoted when you pass on the good news. The question in health and safety, I have found, is what the bad news is that is not being passed up an organisation. In the petroleum and hydrocarbon industry, what is the bad news that is not being heard by the regulator or by the employers? I think the challenge is to promote bad news as opposed to just wanting to hear good news. With that, I commend the bill to the parliament.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (12.50 pm)—I have listened quite closely to the comments of the parliamentary secretary, the member for Maribyrnong, and I have to say I concur with the concerns that he has expressed about the importance of safe workplaces, especially in such dangerous and remote environments as exist in the oil and gas industry. Like the parliamentary secretary, I believe that there should be no compromise when it comes to the safety of individuals working in this environment, but neither the parliamentary secretary nor the minister in his second reading speech has made a case that would give rise to concern about a high accident rate off the coast of Western Australia. Indeed, the parliamentary secretary quoted major accidents abroad in Texas and in the North Sea. But that case has not been made and I would be very happy to find out more about the accident rate in Western Australia because of its offshore activities.

I digress somewhat. I think there are some more covert agendas going on here. Once, the ever-emotive constitutional lawyer, Greg Craven, observed:
Across the world, constitutions go down like South American currencies, producing mayhem and revolution…

Why am I talking about constitutions in a bill dealing with offshore petroleum regulations? Simple. These seemingly benign issues go to the core of Australia’s Federation.

Over the past few weeks we have observed what is becoming a trademark of the current government—the, ‘I’ll take that, thank you’ approach to federal-state relations. Mining royalties, health care and the school curriculum are all being pondered—or should I say ‘plundered’—for a federal takeover. Now this bill, the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010 and the accompanying Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010, which is the one that I am perhaps speaking more to today, join the list.

What does the federal government want? From Western Australia alone it wants $15.3 million in 2010-11; $60 million over a four-year period. What will WA and the rest of the states get in return? Nothing. That is the situation, at least in the short term. That is because this money is going to be used for the federal government to fund a national offshore petroleum regulator, a regulator that has not yet been created, with no firm indication of when it will be created. The government says it will wait until mid-2012 to create the regulator—yet another layer of bureaucracy. Western Australia already has its own regulator. The West Australian government is understandably frustrated. As I indicated before, there are no firm plans to establish the regulator, but the federal government will take the money. In fact, it will be taken from July this year. The WA government submitted to the federal government a letter explaining that the loss of revenue will come at a time when Western Australia will be required to commit funding to infrastructure development for the Gorgon development, and Gorgon will be worth $64 billion over 30 years to this country and will employ 10,000 people at peak. Such a blatant tax grab by the federal government may impede important infrastructure projects in Western Australia. Quality infrastructure rationalises resource projects for the stakeholders, which in turn ensures maximum flow-on returns to both the people of WA and indeed all of the people of this great nation.

We should not forget the difficulty of providing infrastructure in a state as large as Western Australia. It is the world’s second largest subnational administrative division, covering a massive 2.6 million square kilometres. That is roughly the same size as Kazakhstan or five times the size of France, to get it into perspective. The West Australian government is undertaking massive infrastructure projects. Apart from Gorgon, another project is the Oakajee port and rail development. Oakajee is designed to open up WA’s midwest, supporting resource development in the area and ensuring long-term economic prosperity for Western Australia and the nation. The project will cost in excess of $4 billion. Twenty-five kilometres north of Geraldton—that is, 445 kilometres north of Perth—there will be a deepwater multiuse port eventually capable of servicing a number of vessels, including iron ore bulk carriers and dedicated berths for export and import of bulk materials and containers. Five hundred and fifty kilometres of heavy haulage railway will be built to fit into existing railways, and 2,300 hectares will be set aside for an industrial estate and processing facilities. Think then of the further infrastructure needs of the West Australian public, including roads to service these areas, airports, sewerage, electricity and accommodation for workers. With such massive commitments the West Australian government is under-
standably troubled by the Commonwealth holding money that would otherwise be distributed to the West Australian public, including to industry. But what will the federal government do with the money? Where is it going?

Clause 2 in the schedule of the miscellaneous measures bill simply repeals subparagraph 76 of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act, removing registration fees from the list of fees that the federal government normally would collect and then pay out to the states the following month. So the federal government will collect the money but not give it back. No mention is made, however, that the money will go to infrastructure projects. Approximately two-thirds of Australia’s offshore oil and gas resources and 80 per cent of offshore titles are based off the coast of Western Australia. Yet no guarantee is given that any money will flow back to Western Australia. On the contrary, we have just seen the Prime Minister announce—and I will talk about that a little later should time permit—the carve-up of the GST, and Western Australia has been the loser in that carve-up.

The Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association have argued that the industry should not pay any registration fees as it is essentially stamp duty which should have been abolished with the introduction of the GST. While I understand their advocacy for their industry, the massive infrastructure investment required in Western Australia overshadows and outweighs the fees collected. Of course it could be argued that private industry may invest that money back into resource projects, but we have seen the problems of privately controlled infrastructure already in the north of Western Australia. What will the federal government do with this money? We do not know. The federal government does not seem to worry. It cherrypicks state revenue and responsibilities, removing local decision making to the faraway corridors of Canberra. Pru Goward, the New South Wales shadow minister for community services, wrote in the Australian this month:

The home-insulation tragedy demonstrates once more the dangers of federal governments believing their own rhetoric and thinking that they can run the country.

She continues, noting:

… the further government are from services, the worse they are at delivering. There is nothing like immediate and local accountability to keep public administration on its toes.

I say hear, hear to that. Pru is worried about how the federal government, just two hours drive down the road from her, can manage to do what is best. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure you can imagine how people in Perth, five days drive away, feel.

Some people wonder what all the fuss is about. But each time the federal government takes responsibilities away, it is chipping away at the foundations of Australia’s federal system of governance. As an example, Greg Craven points to ‘the usefully rich West Australians’, arguing:

With their small population, they would have little say over their own circumstances in a unitary Australia.

Western Australians already feel this is true. For instance, the recent changes to the GST returns I just alluded to mean that for every dollar paid in GST in WA, only 68c will be returned. But New South Wales will get a return of 95c, and Victoria will get 93c. People in WA feel that the state is being plundered.

Premier Colin Barnett—responding to the recent federal carve-up of the GST, where there were large increases to the revenue of other states, whilst the revenue for WA contracted—put it bluntly when he said:
This country depends on WA for the future growth of the whole nation ... It’s not good for this state but it’s not good for Australia. This is slowing down the growth part of our economy.

We all know that resources are, and will continue to be, the fuel for Australia’s economic growth. We also know that they are finite. Ensuring the economic potential is maximised will require much cooperation between the federal government and the states. I stress that cooperation, not compulsion, is the key. If there is disagreement, the Prime Minister needs to communicate more effectively with the state governments, as he promised to do before the 2007 election, and we see little commitment to that.

This legislation is a case in point. It is true that the federal government consulted the Western Australian government on this legislation. However, WA was given just one week to comment on the loss of $60 million over a four-year period. Where is the fairness in that? Where is the cooperative spirit so often spoken about by the Prime Minister?

Bill Tinapple, the Executive Director of the Petroleum and Environment Division of the Western Australian Department of Mines and Petroleum, even made that point in his letter to the government. Writing on the proposed tax grab, he stressed:

I do not believe that to unilaterally impose this amendment is in the spirit of cooperative federalism publicly embraced by the Federal Government.

Federalism is not perfect—I acknowledge that; it is like democracy in that sense—but it has served us well. Lord Acton, the 19th century British historian and politician reasoned:

The true natural check on absolute democracy is the federal system, which limits the central government by the powers reserved, and the state governments by the powers they have ceded.

Balance is the key. Increasingly, however, the balance of power is going to the federal government.

Michelle Grattan, in her piece ‘Federalism turns on financial carrots and Canberra’s big stick’ quotes AJ Brown, a professor of public law at Griffith University who runs a federalism project. Professor Brown remarks that ‘the debate we are not having is what should be devolved, how we are going to get more diversity.’ Professor Brown is correct. Where is the debate about diversity? Have we forgotten that our Federation was established to reflect the vast diversity of this enormous country? Why is it always thought that being the same is good? Where is the recognition that the states and their administrations are competent?

The wonderful thing about our democratic system of governance is that if the people do not like the way their specific jurisdiction is governed they will sack the incumbents. The state governments go to the polls every four years and the public, the voters, get to have the ultimate say. If the state governments are not administering the affairs of the states fairly and in a proper manner, they lose government. That is the ultimate sanction that the public has a right to impose. If the people are unhappy with the way their state is administered, they can express it at the polls. The question ‘Can Canberra do it better?’ does not always need to be asked, but increasingly it is.

There is nothing that we have done in this place in terms of administering programs out in the communities that demonstrates that we are any better at it. In fact, I hasten to say that the insulation program can demonstrate that we were much worse than we should have been, and that is costing this nation millions of dollars now to rectify. There is a perception that the federal government is the ‘better’ government. With more money, resources and national reach at its disposal, it can appear that the federal government is better equipped to handle significant issues facing Australians. The reality was proven,
as I said, by the insulation scandal. The federal government cannot always manage programs effectively, and the cost to the nation can be very high.

The tragedy of the insulation program shows us that centralising more power in Canberra should not be the default position. If there are problems with federal-state cooperation, work at it—do not just ditch it; do not just seize power; do not just deny states the revenue for them to be able to govern effectively. We are seeing this in the health debate. It is like shifting the chairs on the deck of the Titanic while it is sinking. This is about inadequate revenue to the states to run the health system effectively. I do not believe that the federal government are going to be able to make any difference by just grabbing the money back off the states and then real-locating it to suit their priorities. That is not necessarily going to deliver better health care to Australians. But I digress. I just think that we should give the state governments more than one week to comment on proposals that have such an impact on them. It is not a good situation. There is continual talk of cooperative federalism, but I am afraid the rhetoric does not match the actions of the government in this respect.

The Western Australian government has raised concerns with this legislation and with the national offshore petroleum regulator that this fee grab is supposed to fund. These concerns are not insurmountable. More consultation is required. The views of the Western Australian government should be heard and should be taken notice of. Listen to the states. Respect the framework of the Constitution. Realise that the solutions do not always lie in Canberra. There is a reason that we do not have the mayhem and revolution described by Greg Craven, which I quoted at the beginning of this speech: our Constitution is well drafted and provides the balance that Lord Acton describes. That balance should not be so whimsically and carelessly upset.

There have been mining royalties, health care and the school curriculum, and now there is this blatant tax grab. What are the states getting in return? From this legislation, Western Australia are not getting anything for their money—certainly not at the moment. The federal government, in the minister’s second reading speech, indicated that there will be a delay in the appointment and establishment of a regulator. So why start plundering the funds that are currently going to the state government of Western Australia in July this year when there is no intention of doing anything about a regulator until some time in 2012? I think the public have a right to be cynical about these kinds of moves by this government. I urge the federal government to properly consult with the Western Australian government, to listen to their concerns and to find a solution that is agreeable to all.

I know that under the leadership of Colin Barnett, the Premier of Western Australia, a lot of progress was made early on in this. I know that there has been cooperation between the state of Western Australia and the Australian government on establishing the Oakajee port and a number of other infrastructure projects. But I think we have seen in the last year a major breakdown in proper communications with the states and this blatant grab for power and whatever money can be extracted. One has to question how this money might be distributed in the future, certainly given that Western Australia is the loser in the recent re-carve-up of the goods and services tax.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (1.10 pm)—I rise today to lend my support to the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010 and the Offshore Petroleum
and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010. The fact is that, with 80 per cent of Australia’s electricity generated from coal, no serious response to climate change can ignore the need to clean up coal and our coal fired industries. As I, and most people on this side of the chamber, have said in this House before, we as legislators need to ensure that we have the regulatory environment that encourages the commercialisation of technologies that will play a part in our overall energy needs for the future.

Central to that is carbon capture and storage, geosequestration—the ability to strip carbon from coal fired power stations and inject that into the ground. That is going to be a central theme if we are going to be serious about cleaning up our industry and meeting our power production needs as they climb and also if we are going to be serious about encouraging renewable energy into this power mix. Carbon capture and storage is essential for the long-term sustainability of coal fired power electricity generation and to realise the potential of new industries. I know the Minister for Resources and Energy, who is at the table, has been very passionate about coal-to-liquid technology, which would improve Australia’s liquid transportation fuels security.

The coal industry is highly significant not only in relation to Australia’s economic prosperity but also in relation to the world’s current and forecasted energy needs. As I stated a little earlier, coal currently provides 80 per cent of Australia’s electricity generation capacity. But, in terms of the world’s needs, it provides something like 40 per cent. So coal is not something that is going to disappear. Therefore, we need to concentrate on those technologies that can ameliorate the effects of emissions. One that is central to that is carbon capture and storage. This legislation will do a number of things, but it will not cause people or industries to go out and start investing in carbon capture and storage. What it will do is start finessing some of the regulatory aspects that are going to be essential to improve this aspect of the industry.

Like the member for Maribyrnong, I too worked with the Australian Workers Union. Essentially, my responsibilities for a long period of time included the North West Shelf. I represented workers on various offshore facilities, ranging from the North West Shelf of Western Australia up to the Timor Sea. I know firsthand the challenges involved in the exploration industry and I have seen firsthand the dangers that are apparent in that style of industry. It is a highly competitive industry and it is quite remote from the mainland and certainly remote from the general reach of regulators. I support the call from the member for Maribyrnong regarding our need to work to ensure that safety on offshore facilities is paramount. One of the things that this legislation seeks to do is finesse the regime in terms of, for example, safety around wellheads for people such as derrickmen and tool pushers. This will be absolutely critical for their safety in the workplace.

I am talking about carbon capture and storage as a technique for assisting the amelioration of emissions. I have just come from a meeting of climate change scientists—Professor David Griggs from Monash University and Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg from the University of Queensland. They have also been talking to other members—and, as a matter of fact, they are lunching with other members at the moment. They wanted to talk to us about the science associated with climate change. Due to the regrettable issues associated with one chapter within the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the hacked emails at the University of East Anglia—commonly referred to as ‘climategate’—
these particular scientists are very keen to
ensure that members of this House under-
stand the reality of climate science and the
fact that it is not being seriously contested
amongst the scientists working in the field.

I know anyone can go and spend four
years at a university and come away with a
science degree—and I do not mean to de-
mean people who have science degrees—but
not everyone examines the changes that have
occurred in the climate. One thing these sci-
entists stressed at their recent meeting with
me was that the global climate system has
warmed significantly over the last century
and continues to warm. They sought to bring
the evidence forward that increased global
temperatures mean that there is going to be
lower atmosphere and surface temperatures,
an increase in the heat and content of global
oceans, and an increase in sea levels. They
say these are now matters of fact in terms of
the empirical evidence from the scientists in
this field; that it is beyond contention.

Despite the issue of hacked emails—and,
perhaps, scientists being overly bureau-
ocratic—and despite the paragraph that ap-
ppeared in the report of the Intergovernmental
Panel on Climate Change, this should not
deter people from thinking that the reality is
that climate change is real. It should not be
taken that there is some new-found sci-
ence—and this applies to our colleagues on
the other side of the House—that gives
weight to the arguments of the climate
change sceptics and deniers.

We are committed on this side of the
House to getting on and doing the job that
we were given at the last election—that is,
moving to address climate change. I know
we are experiencing very serious frustrations
in the Senate at the moment. I know a policy
change has occurred on the other side of the
House that being a climate change denier
now is no longer something that should be
sneered at. It seems that they have a policy
which has gone a long way to accommodate
the views of the climate change deniers. But
this is not a matter of politics. We must now
rely on the best science we have available
and use that science to project a methodol-
ogy that will advance this country and allow
us to play our role in terms of a world re-
sponse to climate change.

This bill makes minor policy and technical
changes which will, importantly, pave the
way for the establishment of a National Off-
shore Petroleum Regulator, improve the abil-
ity of the National Offshore Petroleum
Safety Authority to regulate the structural
integrity of facilities, wells and well related
equipment, and clarify the way a range of
provisions regarding titleholders relate to
situations where a title is held by two or
more titleholders.

It is important to recognise that there will
be no adverse effects on industry from this
legislation. By way of background, all the
money the Commonwealth receives from
industry fees under the act and related acts is
presently paid to the states and territories. In
order to fund the establishment of the Na-
tional Offshore Petroleum Regulator, the
government intends to retain those fees paid
under the registration fees act. However, as
the minister stated in his second reading
speech, he will review the fees collected un-
der the act and associated acts to ensure that
the states and territories will be able to con-
tinue carrying out their regulatory functions
on behalf of the Commonwealth until such
times as the regulator is established.

The adjustments in this legislation provide
another step towards working out a green-
house gas storage reality. This is something
that needs to occur and must occur if we are
serious about addressing the issues of cli-
mate change, having regard to the fact that
we are reliant on carbon based energy
sources. I commend this legislation to the House.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (1.21 pm)—in reply—I welcome the opportunity to make some concluding remarks in this complex debate that is very much central to our future economic opportunities as a nation. In that context, I express my appreciation to the members for Groom, O’Connor, Forrest, Pearce, Maribyrnong, Page, Corangamite and Werriwa for their contributions. I want to respond to a few issues raised by the other side of the House.

I firstly go to the comments by the former resources minister, the member for Groom, opposing the removal of registration fees. I simply note that the Commonwealth first proposed the removal of such registration fees in 2002—when, I might say, the current shadow minister and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate was a key member of the government. Perhaps he should reread a little bit of recent history in terms of the previous government’s attitude to one of the key issues before the House today.

I also acknowledge the member for Groom’s comments regarding consultation. I simply say that the need for further consultation is understood by me, as the minister, because we are talking about the future regulation of one of Australia’s key future economic opportunities. For example, we currently export about $10 billion of LNG per year. By 2015-16 that could easily grow to $50 billion per year.

For those reasons, I will not be seeking to take further action on these bills until after the Senate Economics Legislation Committee has completed its inquiry into the legislation and until I have had an opportunity for further discussions with the Ministerial Council on Minerals and Petroleum Resources, which are scheduled for the end of May of this year. The reason I say that is because, in finalising the government’s view on the potential need for a national regulator, I also want to consider the context of the Montara commission report. I say that because in the last 18 months I think we have been very fortunate as a nation. We have actually had two major incidents in the petroleum industry—the Varanus incident and the recent Montara accident. I think we should properly inform ourselves of the potential ramifications and potential changes in regulatory regime required as a result of those accidents. For those reasons, I will proceed with caution, because I actually want to get it right. I also believe that is the desire of the former minister, the member for Groom, who is at the table, and of the current shadow minister, Senator Minchin, who is also a former minister.

Also during that period I will have further consultation with the relevant stakeholders not only at an industry peak council level through the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association but also with individual companies. I have indicated this to a meeting of members of the council of APPEA this morning. I also go to the comments by the members for O’Connor, Forrest and you, Madam Deputy Speaker Moylan. I simply observe for the information of the House that the fees we are talking about are fees generated by the transfer of property not in Western Australia but in Commonwealth waters and are therefore fees properly characterised as Commonwealth revenues. I think the Commonwealth is entitled to have regard for the proper use of its revenue for the purposes of the regulation of this industry. It is therefore important to note that the Commonwealth proposal with respect to the national offshore petroleum regulator contemplates all revenue raised under the offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas storage
legislation being applied to the regulation of this industry with none going into general revenue—which I do not think is necessarily the current case with respect to the activities of state and territory governments. I simply advise the House that this is also what the industry expects: if revenue is collected it is actually used for the regulation of its industry, not for other purposes by state and territory governments.

I also refer to your comments, Madam Deputy Speaker Moylan, that the case for NOPSA has not been made out. I simply reiterate that if you have got any doubts about the proper consideration of these matters, you should pay close attention to the Varanus report—when it is finally released by the Western Australian minister for mines and petroleum, as it is currently in his hands and we await its release in the Western Australian parliament—and the recent Montara incident. The public hearings by Commissioner Borthwick have now commenced and we will be paying close regard to those proceedings and the eventual report presented to the government by Commissioner Borthwick. In my opinion, the status quo is no longer an option.

These bills also appropriately amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 and the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Act 2003. Importantly, they put in place a mechanism to fund the establishment of a new regime for regulating Australia’s offshore petroleum industry. For those reasons the government is acting on the independent recommendations of the Productivity Commission review of regulatory burden on the upstream petroleum—oil and gas—sector. Whilst there is to be a reference to the Senate economics committee, I think the committee should apprise itself of the existing body of work prepared by the Productivity Commission following a detailed process of public consultation and proper consideration of appropriate recommendations aimed at removing the regulatory burden on this key industry. Reducing the cost of regulatory activities and duplication is one of the desired objectives of not only the Productivity Commission but also the industry and the Commonwealth government and, I might say, most state and territory governments. Such a mechanism needs to be put in place, in my opinion, as soon as is practicable. There will therefore be, in establishing such a regulatory organisation, substantial start-up costs, but these new regulatory regimes must come into operation sooner rather than later.

As I indicated in my second reading speech, I do not expect to introduce legislation establishing a national offshore petroleum regulator until next year, as discussions regarding the exact arrangements are ongoing with the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources. The ministerial council’s consideration of these matters cannot properly be finalised until ministers have had the opportunity to consider any relevant recommendations of the Montara Commission of Inquiry, which is due to report by the end of April. There is an opportunity now for discussions and consultations in the lead-up to that report, but in my opinion the report will very much finalise the government’s consideration of the need for this regulatory change.

For reasons consistent with this approach, the government will not press for the Senate to give consideration to this legislation until after the Ministerial Council on Mineral and Petroleum Resources has had the opportunity to further consider the Montara commission report at a meeting scheduled for the end of May. That is a commitment I have given to the ministerial council, which I detail publicly in accordance with the undertakings I have given them—volunteered by me as the Commonwealth minister.
I go to other small but important amendments, including: the strengthening of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority’s functions and powers to more effectively enforce the safety regime; the streamlining and clarification of provisions in relation to multiple titleholders to benefit regulators and titleholders alike; improvements to enforcement and compliance aspects of the regulatory regime; and the clarification of titleholders’ occupational health and safety duties in relation to wells. While there is a difference between the government and opposition at the moment on some aspects of the bill, I understand that there is largely a strong sense of agreement between both sides of the House with respect to these matters.

In essence, these bills underscore the government’s commitment to the maintenance and continual improvement of a strong, effective framework for the regulation of offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas activities. I commend the bills to the House, but in doing so I reiterate the undertakings that I have given to the opposition, industry and state and territory ministers with respect to how I will proceed to finalise the government’s consideration of these complex matters.

Question put.

The House divided. [1.36 pm] (The Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)  

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AYES

Adams, D.G.H.  Albanese, A.N.
Bevis, A.R.  Bidgood, J.
Bird, S.  Bowen, C.
Bradbury, D.J.  Burke, A.S.
Butler, M.C.  Byrne, A.M.
Campbell, J.  Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L.  Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M.  Combet, G.
Crean, S.F.  D’Ath, Y.M.
Dunby, M.  Debus, B.
Dreyfus, M.A.  Elliot, J.
Ellis, A.L.  Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A.  Fergusson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J.  Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P.  Georganas, S.
George, J.  Gibbons, S.W.
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.  Macklin, J.L.
Marles, R.D.  McClelland, R.B.
McKew, M.  McMullan, R.F.
Melham, D.  Murphy, J.
Neal, B.J.  Neumann, S.K.
O’Connor, B.P.  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.  Sidebottom, S.
Smith, S.F.  Snowdon, W.E.
Sullivan, J.  Swan, W.M.
Symon, M.  Tanner, I.
Thomson, C.  Thomson, K.J.
Trevor, C.  Turnour, J.P.
Vamvakinou, M.  Zappia, A.

NOES

Andrews, K.J.  Bailey, F.E.
Baldwin, R.C.  Billson, B.F.
Bishop, J.I.  Briggs, J.E.
Broadbent, R.  Chester, D.
Ciobo, S.M.  Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M.  Dutton, P.C.
Farmer, P.F.  Fletcher, P.
Gash, J.  Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W.  Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A.  Hawker, D.P.M.
Hull, K.E. *  Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J.  Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A.  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.  Moyle, J.E.
Bill read a second time.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (1.40 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AND GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE (SAFETY LEVIES) AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Mr Martin Ferguson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (1.41 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WEEKLY PAYMENTS) BILL 2010

Report from Main Committee

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

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (1.42 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AMENDMENT (RECREATIONAL FISHING FOR MAKO AND PORBEAGLE SHARKS) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 25 February, on motion by Mr Garrett:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (1.43 pm)—The opposition supports the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Recreational Fishing for Mako and Porbeagle Sharks) Bill 2010. We support it because we proposed it. We support it because we argued for it. We support it because we ran a campaign through the agency of Senator Richard Colbeck over summer to bring this bill to pass. The bill rectifies another error from the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, Mr Garrett. It was patently obvious to everybody associated with recreational fishing in Aus-
tralia that the government had made a mess of the recreational fishing sector in November last year when the minister listed for prohibition recreational angling for mako and porbeagle sharks.

He did that despite there being no evidence that these sharks were facing an extinction threat in Australia. And it came as a result of the government’s own attempts to get these sharks listed on an international convention which related to Northern Hemisphere stocks but not Southern Hemisphere and, in particular, Australian stocks. The result was very simple: a healthy recreational fishing sector was cut off. It was through the agency of Senator Richard Colbeck and through the numerous different fishing associations in Australia, such as the Game Fishing Association, RecFish, TARFish, VRFish and the Fishing and Boating Council, that we were able to get a successful campaign up and running throughout the summer to make it clear that that decision by Minister Garrett was wrong and needed to be overturned. This bill seeks to overturn the decision by Minister Garrett. It was introduced by the minister to rectify his own error. It is the latest in a series of errors which undermine his ability to continue in his portfolio. We have elsewhere made the case that the serious errors that led to catastrophic human consequences in the Home Insulation Program should have been in themselves enough to terminate the minister’s ministerial career. This is another error.

What we saw was a decision by the minister to operate through an international forum which was carried out with blind disregard to the circumstances in the waters around Australia. A recreational fishing sector which had been conducted carefully, which had been managed well, which had operated appropriately, was brought to its knees overnight. The ban was due to come into force on 29 January. On 25 January the minister announced the reversal of his position. This bill now seeks to bring to pass the changes which the recreational fishing sector campaigned for and which my state colleague Neale Burgess MP, the state member for Hastings in Victoria, Sarah Henderson, the Liberal candidate for the seat of Corangamite, and Bob Baldwin also campaigned for. We know that Senator Colbeck led the charge on the campaign, which I helped participate in.

These changes should not have been necessary. It was a bad decision. The minister should have recognised that at the outset, having made a bad decision. It should not have required public meetings around southern New South Wales and the Victorian coast to have it reviewed. There were 300 fishing folk who came to Hastings, just near my office. They met outside for a public meeting. There were 500 who went to the coast in Corangamite for a meeting organised by Sarah Henderson. There were also meetings elsewhere in Tasmania. It should not have required a major public uprising by the fishing community to show the errors of the minister’s ways.

However, there is a systemic problem in the way in which the government has gone about managing many environmental issues: snap, unilateral decisions, taken without any understanding of the consequences, have brought about unintended outcomes. We saw that in relation to the Home Insulation Program most catastrophically. We saw that in relation to the Green Loans Program, which has been a financial disaster for thousands and thousands of assessors who relied upon the work of the government. We saw that in relation to the overnight cessation of the solar rebate program, which was put in place by the previous government and mismanaged by the current government. And now we see that in relation to the management of Australia’s fisheries and the decision to bring rec-
reational fishing to its knees overnight on the basis of no scientific evidence.

Now that the minister has reviewed his position it has been confirmed that there was no scientific evidence as the basis for that decision. So it is very clear that what the public saw, what the recreational fishing community saw, what Sarah Henderson saw, what my state colleague Neale Burgess saw, and above all else what Senator Richard Colbeck and the member for Paterson, Bob Baldwin, saw, was correct: this was a sustainable, well-managed recreational fishing sector involving highly capable and competent people, such as the Game Fishing Association of Australia, RecFish, TARFish, VRFish and the Fishing and Boating Council. All of these groups did the right thing. They helped collect 9,000 signatures. A petition was tabled in parliament opposing the ban. There was a massive phone campaign by those recreational fishing community members. They have done a tremendous job.

I am delighted that this bill has been drawn to the parliament’s attention, that the bill has been introduced. We campaigned for it, we support it, we believe in it and we will now see that it passes through the parliament as expeditiously as possible. I thank the members of the fishing community who brought it into being. I commend the bill and I condemn the minister.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (1.50 pm)—The member for Flinders, an eloquent speaker at the best of times, tells a story—

Mr Hunt—At the best of times?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I will give credit where it is due. He tells a story but he never tells the full story. I would like to correct the record for those listening and for Hansard. Essentially, what we have in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Recreational Fishing for Mako and Porbeagle Sharks) Bill 2010 is an amendment, required because this government was forced under the legislation of the former government—that is, the government of the member for Flinders made it mandatory—to list a threatened species in our legislation. That is what the member for Flinders did not say: under the legislation that we are bound by, both nationally and through our signing of the convention of 1991 in relation to this, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, it was mandatory—

Mr Hunt—Except you guys argued for the listing of the species in the first place!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—The member for Flinders, who wants to make a noise or a squeak on the way out of the House, at least now knows what the full story is. I wish that he would tell the full story. He forgot to mention that members on this side of the House, the member for Braddon—moi, if he has forgotten—and the member for Corangamite, to name two, along with their communities of fishers, were also onto this issue, which arose because we were forced by the former government’s legislation to carry out our obligations. That is what a responsible government does.

In his frenzied attack on the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, the member for Flinders forgot to mention (1) that the minister himself was bound by the act and (2) that the minister moved quickly. To resolve this issue upon investigation required more than regulatory changes. It also required more than administrative changes. It required a legislative change. Nothing moves quickly in this place. Nothing moves quickly unless those opposite are trying to think up a new policy on the run. Nothing moves quickly in this place when drawing up legislation. However, that is what this amendment is designed to do. I am glad that those opposite are going to support this,
because we are trying to introduce an amendment to fix up a situation which does not allow enough flexibility and unfortunately has negative consequences for offence provisions under the current act. That is what this legislation is essentially trying to do.

I would like to take the House through this because it is an important story and it is going to have a positive result—not just because we have both sides of the House going about our business, as we should, in a responsible way but also because it will allow recreational fishing to continue in a sustainable way in our waters, particularly down Tassie way. We have magnificent waters both onshore and offshore and we have a lovely recreational fishing industry. I encourage everyone to come down and participate in it. I think I am the only person who does not fish up my way. No doubt I will develop the patience to do that.

Effectively, as the minister made clear in his second reading speech, the introduction of this legislation is trying to overcome an inflexible provision under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999. It intends to make recreational fishing of shortfin mako, longfin mako and porbeagle sharks legal. Once any species is listed under appendix I of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals as being in dire threat or under appendix II as maybe being threatened, under the provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 of this country we are obligated to list it as a threatened species. That is what happened. We were obligated under an international convention and our national law to list them. Once that was done, it unfortunately threatened recreational fishing, particularly of the shortfin mako shark. That is basically what the situation is.

Rightfully so, fishing groups, particularly recreational fishing groups, were mad about this. That was for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it is an important recreational hobby. People have been doing it for a long time and have invested in equipment—particularly boats, reels and so forth—and it is important to them. Secondly, it plays an important part in recreational fishing clubs. Thirdly, in the main, the fishing of mako sharks in particular and most of our recreational fishing is done in a very sustainable way. As the member opposite pointed out, there was no scientific evidence to suggest that the mako shark was threatened in our waters. We acknowledge that. But what the member for Flinders did not point out was that under the 1999 act of the former government and because of our obligations to the international Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals we were obligated to put a moratorium on the fishing of the mako shark. That is the situation.

Those opposite will ask why we did not just ring up and say, ‘Hey, forget about it.’ The problem is that under those obligations we could not make a regulatory change, nor could we make an administrative change. This required a legislative change, which we now have before this House. We acted a hell of a lot quicker than those opposite ever acted on any other issue requiring legislation. The point is that we are obligated under the current act, the act of the former government, and under appendices I and II of the international convention listing threatened species.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—No amount of cat-calling from the member for Paterson is going to change that. It is very sad that the member for Flinders did not tell the whole story in his attempts to run out and attack the minister for the environment. He forgot to mention, too, that those on this side of the
House have been working constructively and closely with the fisher groups and also with the minister to get this change. But the member for Flinders did not mention the member for Corangamite and others. Why would that be? He was not trying to score a political point, was he? Was he really trying to fix the situation or was he trying to ramp up some public meetings and put out another petition, knowing very well that the minister would meet the obligation to introduce legislation rather than regulation and administration to change the current law forced on us as part of the Howard government’s legislation? The minister acted responsibly and quickly, and I thank all those on this side who worked with the minister instead of grandstanding in little public meetings, knowing very well that we could do nothing until the legislation was passed. I commend the minister for his action on this. I certainly commend the member for Corangamite—and the member for Braddon, frankly—and all those on this side who tried to do something about it. Shame on the member for Flinders for not telling the full story about what was necessary to change this legislation.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Home Insulation Program

Mr ABBOTT (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister and I refer the Prime Minister to remarks made last Friday by the Secretary of the new Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, who told a meeting of 700 staff:

It’s not like DCC has any expertise in this area. DCC is not a program manager … I know nothing about program design, about program delivery, about program risk management.

Given this damning admission, how can the public have any confidence that the government can fix the massive public policy failure of its Home Insulation Program?

Mr RUDD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Firstly, Minister Combet, as the Leader of the Opposition would know, has been handed responsibility for the wind-up of the Home Insulation Program. Secondly, the department which has energy efficiency functions within it has also brought in a new departmental deputy secretary to deal with these matters. Thirdly, I say to the honourable Leader of the Opposition that the minister also intends to engage very closely with industry, unions and regulators to ensure that risks going forward are managed in the best possible way. Furthermore, could I advise the Leader of the Opposition that the minister’s department will be guided in design and implementation of the scheme by an independent advisory panel. This will include Dr Ron Silverberg, ex-managing director of the HIA; Mr Peter Tighe, National Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union; and Mr Tony Arnel, the Victorian building and plumbing commissioner and Chair of the Green Building Council of Australia. This panel of experts has also been commissioned to advise on the proposed implementation arrangements for the Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme.

Hospitals

Mr NEUMANN (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the need for reform in Australia’s health system after years of neglect and inaction?

Mr RUDD—They had 12 years to do something about the health system of Australia and they did nothing—absolutely nothing. The Leader of the Opposition and I were
privileged to be invited to last night’s annual dinner of the Australian Medical Association. I listened very keenly to hear a policy speech from the Leader of the Opposition. What I heard again were a number of political one-liners destined for media consumption but not destined for real policy change.

I also appreciate the support for the government’s plan which we received last night from the head of the AMA, Dr Pesce, who said:

We are heading for a once-in-a-generation change to the way health services are delivered and funded and managed in this country.

From the top, the Commonwealth must have a greater funding and national planning role.

And from the grassroots, there must be more local clinician input to decision-making at the local level, to ensure funding meets local needs.

That is what the head of the AMA said last night in support of the government’s plan. In the months leading up to the release of the government’s plan only last week, the Minister for Health and Ageing and I travelled across the country to speak with doctors, nurses, patients and those who are intimately associated with the health and hospital system of Australia.

Whether it is in Hobart or in Darwin or in Perth or in Parramatta, right across the country there is one clear message: not enough hospital beds, not enough doctors and not enough nurses. On the question of nurses, in 2008 Access Economics estimated that around 6,000 additional nurses would be needed each year to 2025 over and above the current graduations of 9,000 a year. On GPs, the health department estimated that demand for GP services is likely to increase by around 15 per cent by 2020 on current trends and the current GP training pipeline will not meet this demand growth. These are the workforce challenges that we now face. Of course, if you have an insufficient supply of doctors and nurses, what results is longer waiting times. The NHHRC reported that data indicates that the median waiting time across all types of elective surgery was 34 days in 2007-08, up from 28 days in 2003-04—getting worse and worse. On emergency departments, 31 per cent of patients presenting in emergency departments in 2007-08 were not seen within clinically acceptable times. This is the direct product of sustained underinvestment in the system by the Australian government and governments across the nation.

Back in July of 2006, when a certain Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Health and Ageing, he got a letter from the head of the AMA warning him and warning the government of the looming crisis in medical training. This is what the head of the AMA had to say to the Leader of the Opposition when he was discharging such a fine set of responsibilities as health minister of Australia. This is what the AMA warned back in 2006:

… without urgent action by all governments, Australia will have a new generation of doctors who … will struggle to gain the detailed education and significant clinical skills needed to practise independently.

He went on to say that this would:

… have catastrophic effects on the medical workforce, our hospitals, and the access to quality health care that patients rightly expect.

That is what the head of the AMA wrote to the Leader of the Opposition when he was in the position of health minister of Australia. What did the Leader of the Opposition as health minister of Australia do in response to this representation from the AMA? Nothing. Instead, the then health minister decided to rip out $1 billion from the public hospital system, and that $1 billion is the equivalent of 1,025 hospital beds. They do not like this number—$1 billion ripped out by Tony Ab-
bott when he was minister for health, which is the equivalent of 1,025—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The Manager of Opposition Business will withdraw.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw my statement that the Prime Minister is a liar.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business knows that he must come to the dispatch box and withdraw unconditionally.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Further to the instruction you have just given to the Manager of Opposition Business, let me just say that the Prime Minister’s statement is a lie.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I am happy to withdraw but I would suggest that it would help the House—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. He does not have the call. The Leader of the Opposition knows that if he has a problem with statements made which he believes need redress he can use other forms of the House at the end of question time.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: with due respect to you, we have on many occasions since this parliament began found a situation where you have acted within what is, I think, your understanding of the standing orders to say that when an untruth is remarked upon by the other side of the House, the remedy for that is for the leader to stand up at the end of question time and correct the record. But, as we know, that is not broadcast and this is. So the untruth remains on the public record.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. Those on my right will remain silent. As I have indicated previously, one of the things that I have learned since becoming Speaker is that I am apparently producing a media event, because it seems that the behaviour of members is dictated on the basis of whether there are visual images going out to people’s lounge rooms, whether there is broadcast—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—That is not my problem. My problem is to try to run this place based on precedent and the standing and sessional orders, and I think I am doing that. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition was asked to withdraw and he has not done so.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I am sorry if people are under the belief that in his earlier statement the Leader of the Opposition did not withdraw. I simply say to a number of people that are giving me this free advice by interjection: it is a bit hard to keep up with what is going on when people think that they can all talk at once. I am assuming that the Leader of the Opposition did withdraw. He then rose to make a different point, to which I have made comment. The Manager of Opposition Business appears to be aggrieved about my opinions on that. Is the Manager of Opposition Business rising on a point of order?

Mr Pyne—I am, Mr Speaker, and I am not aggrieved by your statements. I simply make the point, as under standing order 91(f), that you have said that it is not your problem. May I remark, with due respect, that if the opposition is provoked by people making untruths it leads to disorderly con-
duct and that that is your problem—to maintain orderly conduct in the House.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. On the element of his comment—rather than point of order—that of course the behaviour of any member is my problem, I acknowledge that. But I simply put it to members of long standing—probably those that were here in the previous parliament and beyond—that it has ever been the case during question time that from time to time repeated remarks are made that require withdrawal under the standing and sessional orders and practices of this place. That is done at the end of question time, and I think that what we find today is consistent with the way in which the House has conducted its business in the past.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Certainly I was aware, both as Leader of the House and when I was Manager of Opposition Business, that when the Speaker requires a comment to be withdrawn it should be done unconditionally. That has not occurred. The Leader of the Opposition is required to stand at the dispatch box and simply say, ‘I withdraw.’

The SPEAKER—If it would assist the House, whilst I believe that the Leader of the Opposition has withdrawn—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I would find it incredible—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! In attempting to assist the House out of this strange dilemma in which it has placed itself, if I could ask the Leader of the Opposition just to simply say yet again that he has withdrawn, that would finalise the case. I do not see it as further punishment of the Leader of the Opposition. I have indicated to him that I felt and thought that he had withdrawn, but if it would get this place moving towards the proper conduct of question time I would invite him to assist in that manner.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, to assist the aurally challenged, I withdraw.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—For the information of the Leader of the Opposition, I draw his attention to the budget papers of 2003-04. On page 179, under the Australian healthcare agreement itemised at that time, for 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07, the following figures are listed—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar is warned.

Mr Rudd—In 2003-04, minus $108 million; 2004-05, minus $172 million; 2005-06, minus $264 million; 2006-07, minus $372 million. I simply go through those figures to draw them to the attention of the Leader of the Opposition. I also draw to the Leader of the Opposition’s attention that when he was minister for health, while he may be uncomfortable about his record, he also imposed a cap on GP training places. I can understand full well why the Leader of the Opposition is sensitive about his record as health minister—a sensitivity which is only underpinned and surpassed by his undertaking to the Australian people, that absolute ironclad guarantee, that there would be no change to the Medicare safety net—a rock solid, ironclad guarantee, until after the election. That is what the Leader of the Opposition did when he was health minister. What we have done in the two years we have been in office through the agency of the minister for health is increase the number of GP training places by some 35 per cent. That is what we have
done. From 2009 universities offered an additional 1,094 undergraduate nursing places. That is what we have done. On top of that, in terms of funding to our public hospitals, we have increased our allocation to hospitals in the states and territories by some 50 per cent. If you want three concrete pieces of action, those are they.

Those opposite, not content with their record on health and hospitals reform, which is a dismal record, right now in another place, in the Senate, are seeking to block important pieces of legislation and stand in the way of further reform to the health and hospital system. They are blocking changes to PHI—a blocking which will result in taxpayers paying $2 billion, money which could be better invested in public hospital beds across Australia. On top of that, they in the Senate have refused to pass landmark legislation giving more support and recognition to our midwives and nurse practitioners. This is unacceptable. Those opposite find this to be a passing irritant; they do not think that nurse practitioners and midwives are important. We on this side of the House do. Dental services have been blocked by those in the Senate; they have refused to pass legislation for Australia’s first ever preventative healthcare agency.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is time on health and hospitals reform, that he just got out of the road, that he actually allowed the government to get on with the business of fundamental health and hospital reform for the future. We intend to get on with the business of bringing about this reform for Australia. I will be consulting with the premiers and chief ministers in the days ahead, prior to COAG in April. We have a plan for the future. I will begin that process with the Premier of New South Wales in Sydney tomorrow. I will travel to every state capital in the country and every territory capital to bring about the needed reforms for our health and hospital system for the future.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the government’s concession that foil insulation is a potential death trap and that the 50,000 homes installed with it must now finally be inspected and repaired. Given that insulation products installed under the Prime Minister’s scheme have so far caused at least 105 house fires, and given that 240,000 homes are likely to have dangerous or dodgy insulation, will the Prime Minister guarantee that all of the more than one million homes installed with potentially dangerous or dodgy insulation will also receive a thorough safety inspection?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. I also draw the honourable member’s attention to a statement delivered in this place by the minister responsible for energy efficiency, Minister Combet, yesterday. Based on advice received by that minister, I would also say to the honourable member who has asked the question that those who have received foil insulation will have the option of having either that foil insulation removed or safety switches installed. That will apply to all the homes he has referred to. This also is based on advice from the Master Electricians of Australia and the National Electrical Contractors Association. The minister will make further statements to the House as appropriate in terms of further action that may be needed.

Hospitals

Ms REA (2.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How will the government’s health reform plan improve the financial sustainability of the health system and end both blame shifting and cost shifting between the states and the Commonwealth?
The SPEAKER—I call the Minister for Health and Ageing.

Mr Dutton—On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Ms ROXON—Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Ms ROXON—This is an important question—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Ms ROXON—because it goes to the vital issue—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Ms ROXON—of cost shifting and blame shifting—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Ms ROXON—This is something that the Leader of the Opposition never paid any attention to.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will wait a moment.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—No, the member for Dickson will resume his seat. The minister will resume her seat. On a day when the Manager of Opposition Business has approached the dispatch box and has indicated in a point of order that his concern is the way in which the proceedings of the House are conducted at a time when its processes are broadcast, I would indicate to the House that I perhaps will look at the processes of this place through those eyes. If that means that people think that I will willingly allow them to interrupt proceedings based on raising points of order when they are aware of what I am doing, I will not. I will clearly say to the member for Dickson that, if he looks at his record and the number of times during this parliament that I have had to ask him to leave the chamber at times when he has abused his ability to raise a point of order, he will understand why, based on the precedent of other Speakers since Federation, I have chosen on this occasion not to recognise him. That does not mean that that will happen all the time, but on this occasion that was my decision. I am now calling the Minister for Health and Ageing to answer the question.

Ms ROXON—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I can understand why those opposite have a raw nerve when it comes to talking about health care because they did nothing in government and they have done nothing in opposition and now they want to stand in the way of some of the biggest reforms to the healthcare system since a Labor government introduced Medicare 30 years ago. That is why they are touchy and that is why they do not want to hear the answer to this question.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Ms ROXON—The question that was asked by the member for Bonner—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Ms ROXON—goes to the absolute fundamentals of our health reform proposals, and that is that we must end the cost shifting and blame shifting between the states and the
Commonwealth. When we came to government we inherited a Commonwealth-state share of financing the health system which had plummeted to an all-time low because of the irresponsible actions of the Leader of the Opposition. He ripped $1 billion out of the public hospital system and what happened is that it got to an all-time low with the Commonwealth contributing just below 35 per cent of the share of funding of public hospitals.

The Prime Minister announced last week that our government is determined to take on the dominant funding role from hereon into the future of 60 per cent of the share of hospital funding—a major change to the way hospital services are funded and run across this country. The key thing that this fixes is the argument over the Commonwealth doing a negotiation with the states at the start of a five-year period, fixing in what they pay for a five-year period, handing it over to the states and then saying, ‘It doesn’t matter what happens with changing demographics, doesn’t matter what happens with the cost of health expenditure, doesn’t matter what happens where the population moves.’ We are not prepared to leave our communities in that situation anymore. We are prepared to take on a dominant funding role and to make sure that we are bearing responsibility for a bigger share of the growth both in population and in the cost of providing health care. We must do this. We must get to the bottom of building an incentive into the system that allows cost shifting and blame shifting. We are determined to fix this problem because we think cost shifting and blame shifting are wasting scarce health resources that need to be spent in the system.

Unfortunately, not everybody in this place believes that resolving the problem of cost shifting is important. We know that not everybody believes this because the Leader of the Opposition himself, in 2006, wrote in an article in the Australian: ‘Cost shifting is unavoidable. You can’t stop it so you might as well just live with it.’ What a lazy approach. What a defeatist approach. What an absolutely irresponsible approach to take to the most important delivery of services to our community across the country and that is our health services. Our government is not prepared to just live with it.

We understand that we were elected to do the opposite, to fix the problems that the Liberal government handed us for 11 years. In total, over the next decade the Commonwealth will be responsible for billions of extra dollars of expenditure that otherwise would burden state budgets. In the short term, people are already benefiting from the $20 billion investment of extra funding flowing through to front-line health services. This is a 50 per cent increase on the position that we inherited when the Leader of the Opposition was the health minister. This is the 50 per cent increase that the shadow Treasurer, who does not appear to be here today, has said he would not sign onto. He said he did not agree to pay this money to the states and territories—did not agree to the Commonwealth investing more in hospital services. We are going to do the heavy lifting on health. We are going to help ensure that generations to come will enjoy world-class universally accessible health care. The contrast could not be clearer with the Leader of the Opposition, who turned the blame game into an Olympic sport. We are not going to have any more of it and it is time for him to get out of the way and let us get on with the job.

Home Insulation Program

Mr HUNT (2.28 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the project control group which ran his Home Insulation Program, comprising his department, the Deputy Prime Minister’s department as well as the department of the
environment. Given that the project control group was designing and directing the implementation of the scheme, did that group water down safety recommendations and will he now admit direct prime ministerial responsibility for the scheme’s failure?

**Mr Rudd**—I thank the honourable member for his question. Can I say in response to the honourable member’s question that the policy work which led to the establishment of the Home Insulation Program began in August 2008 and continued through to the launch of the full program 11 months later, on 1 July 2009. Furthermore, in August 2008 the government launched a cross-departmental Energy Efficiency Taskforce. That in turn recommended a national energy efficiency strategy, which in turn had within it a sustainable homes assistance package, worth $2.9 billion. Furthermore, in early 2009 the government developed the Energy Efficient Homes program as part of its Nation Building and Jobs Plan. On 3 February 2009 that package was announced. Between 3 February and 1 July 2009—in response to the member’s question—the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts spent five months designing the final policy implementation.

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

**The Speaker**—The Prime Minister will resume his seat.

**Mr Tuckey**—It will give him a chance to find his place!

**The Speaker**—Is the member for O’Connor suggesting that the Prime Minister should thank the member for Sturt? I call the Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order.

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister has been asked three specific questions about the home insulation disaster. Each answer has been this dirge of irrelevance. I ask you to ask him to be relevant to the question rather than the blah, blah we are getting.

**The Speaker**—The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

**Mr Rudd**—The honourable member asked me a question about this project control group. What I was seeking to do was to provide the honourable member with the context within which this group operated. Can I say, in response further to the honourable member’s question, that I am advised the project control group was established in April 2009 to enhance cross-departmental coordination of the project design implementation. I am further advised that this is the normal practice within government—to establish a project control group or interdepartmental committee to develop and implement major projects. Furthermore, the chair of the project control group was the deputy secretary of the department of the environment—

**Mr Hunt**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order: relevance. The question asked whether the project control group watered down safety recommendations.

**The Speaker**—That was one aspect of the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

**Mr Rudd**—The chair of that group, as the member for Flinders asked me before, was the deputy secretary of the department of the environment. The member for Flinders asked me questions about its reporting and accountability arrangements. I am simply advising the member for Flinders that the terms of reference of the project control group require the chair or the representative of that group to report to the executive management of the department of the environment. I have nothing before me which would indicate that that group in any way did anything other than the advice that they received on the question of safety standards.
Mr Laming—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The SPEAKER—The member for Bowman will resume his seat. I have had two points of order, and the Prime Minister has concluded.

Employment

Mr CHEESEMAN (2.32 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on Australia’s recent employment performance and the need to provide certainty for working families?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. I know that he would have followed today’s news that the unemployment number for last month, the month of February, remained effectively steady at 5.3 per cent, in line with market expectations. This unemployment number obviously indicates that our economy has done far better than many would have expected at the start of the global financial crisis and global recession, the worst global recession in more than 75 years. These figures show that our economy has outperformed virtually every other advanced economy during the global recession. We know that this performance would not have been as strong if it had not been for the quick and decisive action of this government in investing in our economy and supporting Australian jobs. Without that quick and decisive action, hundreds of thousands more Australians would have been unemployed. This action has helped give Australian families certainty during very uncertain times.

But, whilst today’s figures are encouraging, they remind us that there is nothing that should be taken for granted. There are 128,000 Australians who have become unemployed since the global financial crisis hit in September 2008. What these unemployment figures are telling us and what we know from around the nation is that many working families face significant pressures and uncertainties as they seek to build a future for themselves. That is why the government is so determined to continue to invest in nation-building infrastructure to stimulate local economies and to support jobs, and it is why our reforms are well designed and costed, because we believe in providing certainty and support for working families around the country.

This is a stark contrast to the attitude of the opposition, which is not focused on building the nation; it is focused on saying no to absolutely everything—no to economic stimulus to support the jobs of working Australians; no to the Fair Work Act, because it would rather go back to Work Choices; and then this week we have seen a debate break out about the opposition acting to deny working parents paid parental leave. We know that the risk to paid parental leave in this parliament is the Leader of the Opposition, who is shaping up to block the bill to deliver paid parental leave. Out of his own mouth, the Leader of the Opposition has said, ‘We’ll be amending it to try and make it our scheme’—his scheme being one that would put cost of living pressures on working families because it would put up the price of bread and milk and the basic groceries that they rely on. I thank the members of the opposition backbench who are nodding their heads in agreement because they understand that.

The Leader of the Opposition is a risk to the budgets of working families. This is a man that the former Treasurer Peter Costello viewed as being such a risk to the economy that he would not even have trusted him to be his deputy. No doubt the former Treasurer Peter Costello formed that view because, when the Leader of the Opposition was min-
ister for health and he used to be asked about how they were going to fund health policies, he would just shrug his shoulders and say: ‘Peter will provide. He always does.’ Well, Peter has gone now and, with Peter gone, the Leader of the Opposition is looking to put these burdens directly onto working families to fund his hastily cobbled together schemes. When I say ‘hastily cobbled together’, no-one in the Liberal Party knew about it. You really have to try hard to make the member for Wentworth look like a model of inclusiveness and consultation, but that is what the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer you, Mr Speaker, to page 553 of *House of Representatives Practice* and the advice we all receive there that past Speakers have considered it appropriate to consider comment on the opposition benches as an irrelevance.

_Government members interjecting—_

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, we now know why there is a problem with literacy when you hear that. In completing my remarks, Mr Speaker, I would say to you that you have just demonstrated to the member for Dickson, quite properly, your power to call upon a member who is breaching precedent and the standing orders to resume their seat. You need no other. This minister is now transgressing. She has nothing positive to say. All she can carry on about is what this side is doing.

The SPEAKER—The member for O’Connor has raised a point of order—and he at least sat down before he continued to develop a debate. I apologise to him that I will now read a bit that he will have to put back in context. He raised comments on page 553, which then goes on to say:

On other occasions such comments have been permitted.

_Government members interjecting—_

The SPEAKER—Order! It is not offered simply for entertainment or mirth.

Mr Melham—For literacy!

The SPEAKER—The member for Banks is warned! I only mentioned that to indicate the difficulties there are in indicating to members that the chair is simply trying to be consistent in something that is not completely an exact science. The Deputy Prime Minister has the call. She will respond to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I can guarantee to the House that comprehension will figure prominently in the national curriculum. The reason that I am commenting on the policy of the opposition is that it does seem to me a little bit interesting that now they do not want to talk about paid parental leave, as the policy has crumbled before the eyes of the Leader of the Opposition. On Monday he made his big announcement, on Tuesday he thought it was okay and now, of course, they do not really want to talk about it anymore. The problem with their policy is that it is a threat in the Senate to us delivering our paid parental leave scheme. There was no consultation on this policy. There was no consultation with the member who approaches the despatch box.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I also refer to page 553 of the *House of Representatives Practice* and the part referred to by the member for O’Connor on a point of relevance and your additional comments from that page, when you said:

On other occasions such comments have been permitted.

But I would read the rest of it, which says:

... although a question should not ask a Minister about opposition policy as the Minister is not responsible for it.
It is clearly out of order.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Mackellar for reminding us that the standing orders are very precise about what can be in questions. They are not, regrettably, so precise about what can be contained in an answer. I have made mention of this on many occasions. The House could take some action if they felt aggrieved by the standing orders by suggesting that perhaps the Procedures Committee revisit question time.

Mr Pyne—We have.

The SPEAKER—The House has not decided that.

Mr Pyne—This side has.

The SPEAKER—Therefore the standing orders are as such.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt is warned! He really must learn that every occasion is not an opportunity for him to interject. I am pleased that, as yet, he is reluctant to interject on the Clerk. The Deputy Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—in conclusion, I was asked about certainty for working families and risks for working families. A clear risk is that our paid parental leave scheme legislation will be blocked and we will be unable to pay benefits to people next year. Of course, this is because of the attitude of the Leader of the Opposition—the man who says he will consult with his back bench and then does not; the man who says that there will be no new taxes and then announces a huge, new tax; the man who actually explains all of this by saying—his words not mine: ‘You have to make departures from principles.’ I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his straight talk about his lack of principle, but working women will not thank him if he blocks paid parental leave.

Home Insulation Program

Mr ABBOTT (2.43 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister and it again relates to his role in the failure of the Home Insulation Program. I refer the Prime Minister to his department’s annual report, in which the then head of the Cabinet Implementation Unit states:

In little more than three months, the team went from a standing start to having a working system capable of registering thousands of insulation installation providers and processing tens of thousands of individual claims every month with high levels of control and accountability.

When did the Prime Minister or his office first become aware that the so-called high levels of control and accountability were in fact resulting in fraud, unsafe insulation, house fires, electrified roofs and deaths?

Mr RUDD—On the question of the policy and the design features around it, as I indicated in my response to the member for Flinders before, they were determined by cabinet in February 2009. I also say to the Leader of the Opposition that, in the period between the taking of that decision by the cabinet and the implementation of the scheme on 1 July 2009, the implementation features were then designed by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

On the development of the program in the period in between then—and the Leader of the Opposition specifically goes to the question of advice back to me as a member of cabinet—can I advise the Leader of the Opposition of this: the Nation Building and Jobs Plan implementation reports were received by the relevant cabinet committee. I am advised that the first implementation report was provided on 18 February 2009 and it was considered by the committee then. The implementation report referred to no safety is-
issues related to the Home Insulation Program, which by that stage had not commenced.

A further report was delivered to the relevant cabinet committee on 10 March. The March implementation report referred to no safety issues related to the Home Insulation Program. A third report was delivered to the cabinet committee, which I chair, on 11 June 2009. That report referred to no safety issues related to the Home Insulation Program. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question.

The SPEAKER—The member for Shortland.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—The SPEAKER—The member for Shortland has the call.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is warned!

Paid Parental Leave

Ms HALL (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. How will paid parental leave policies that rely on new taxes on business harm the economy and impact on the costs of living?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Shortland for her question. The paid parental leave scheme being put forward by those opposite has at its core a $10.8 billion tax, which will harm the economy and, of course, will risk family budgets. The Leader of the Opposition has spent a lot of time talking about big new taxes—well, this one is a whopper. It is the Big Mac of taxes. Of course it will impact on business, it will impact on employment and it will impact on family budgets.

I think we can all celebrate today’s employment figures, which were spoken about before by the Deputy Prime Minister. But this big tax is a risk to investment. This big tax is a risk to jobs. Those opposite are having a few problems coordinating their discussions on economic policy. I note that the Leader of the Opposition said that the shadow Treasurer and the finance spokesman should have known about this scheme because they could have read it in his book—which was published a year ago. We know they do not actually read very often, and this is part of the problem.

We know that last December the shadow Treasurer actually missed a very substantial revision to the national accounts—billions of dollars just went past him and he did not notice. So they do not do a lot of reading. But there is some reading they should do—for example, a recent report from the OECD, which said:

Corporate taxes are found to be the most harmful for growth ...

This is something that those opposite do not appear to understand: the need to invest for growth, the need to invest to employ Australians.

They have proven, through what has occurred over the last couple of days, what a serious risk to our national economy they have become. They could not even work out whether the tax is going to be imposed on businesses with a $5 million turnover or on businesses that paid $5 million worth of tax—thereby leaving something like 2,500 businesses in limbo. This demonstrates that they are a risk to investment and a risk to business. What they do not appear to understand is that this tax will be passed on to families—passed on at the supermarket, passed on at the petrol station and of course passed on at the local bank. That demonstrates just how out of touch they are.

What this is all about is trying to prove that somehow they are pro family—after they supported Work Choices which ripped away fundamental conditions for families.
On this side of the House, we are proud of the first-ever commitment to a paid parental leave scheme from an Australian government, from the Rudd government—a scheme which is affordable, a scheme which is sustainable and a scheme which does not require a big tax which will cost jobs.

The Speaker—the member for Ballarat.

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—Hold on. The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Julie Bishop—Can’t you count?

The Speaker—Order! I know that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was not directing that comment to me. I admit that I got confused and I have rectified it straightaway. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Home Insulation Program

Mr Abbott (2.50 pm)—My question is, again, to the Prime Minister. In light of the Prime Minister’s previous answer, is he seriously telling the House that he was never informed about the safety problems, fires and deaths under the Home Insulation Program? Will he now inform the House when he was so informed and who finally informed him?

Mr Rudd—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. In my earlier answer to his question, I outlined the government’s decision-making process leading up to the commencement of the scheme on 1 July 2009. The honourable Leader of the Opposition asked questions about subsequent safety and compliance matters which arose. Let me provide him with the following information.

On 14 August, I received a letter from the then minister in relation to the Home Insulation Program proposing increased compliance requirements for the program. On 17 August, the relevant cabinet committee considered the compliance issues raised by the minister in his 14 August letter. The committee approved changes to the program guidelines which included requiring the following: physical site inspections prior to giving quotes, increased inspections and scrutiny of trainer qualifications, increased compliance communications and processes for suspending and deregistering non-compliant installers.

On 27 August 2009, I received a letter from the minister drawing my attention to concerns about new entrants to the market not adequately meeting required standards on work undertaken. The minister proposed changes to the program to require installers to provide physical evidence of qualifications and/or competencies before they were registered. On 28 August, I am advised, these changes to the program guidelines were released and, on 4 September, I wrote to the minister noting that these changes had been made.

On 22 October 2009, the relevant cabinet committee again considered the Home Insulation Program and discussed increasing the requirements on installers to increase compliance. On 28 October, the minister wrote to me to indicate the actions he intended to take in response. These included requiring householders to get two quotes and to publish a public list of deregistered installers. On 29 October, I responded to this letter, agreeing to the minister’s proposals to tighten the guidelines. On 30 October, Minister Garrett wrote to me in relation to safety issues in the Home Insulation Program, a proposal to roll out an electrical safety testing program for homes that have had foil insulation, a proposed ban on metal fasteners, and a proposal to mandate the use of covers over downlights and other ceiling appliances.

On 2 November 2009, I replied to the minister, noting the package of safety meas-
ures which he had outlined. On 30 November 2009, Minister Garrett announced mandatory training or minimum skill requirements would be developed further. On 17 December, Minister Garrett announced increased training requirements: all installers going into ceilings must have either a trade-specific competency, prior insulation industry experience or must have completed a registered or accredited training course. That commenced as of 12 February 2010. On 9 February 2010, Minister Garrett banned the use of foil insulation under the Home Insulation Program and, on 10 February 2010, Minister Garrett announced that every home that had foil insulation installed under the government’s Home Insulation Program would undergo an electrical safety inspection. On 19 February 2010, the relevant cabinet committee made the decision to close the program.

These are the steps which occurred during the process of decision making leading up to the commencement of the program on 1 July 2009. That, I am advised, is the correspondence between myself and the minister on this matter over the period since then.

I would also draw the honourable Leader of the Opposition’s attention to the statement made in the House yesterday by Minister Combet, the minister responsible for energy efficiency, and the measures which he has now put in place concerning the wind-up of the existing program and any guidelines which will be developed relevant to a replacement program.

**Paid Parental Leave**

Ms KING (2.55 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Will the government consider significant new policy proposals from other sources? Why is it important for such proposals to be properly detailed and costed?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Ballarat for her question. The government is always open to considering new policy ideas, whether they be from the opposition or from any other sources. In fact, in my own portfolio I am eagerly awaiting savings suggestions from the opposition. It has been almost seven years since a Liberal shadow finance minister or finance minister advanced a substantial savings initiative. In fact, the 2003 budget was the last time, so I am eagerly awaiting some new ideas on that front.

We do not pick up just any old idea or any old garbled bit of gobbledygook that gets thrown at us. We apply a quality control test. Unfortunately, the proposal which the opposition most recently put forward, with respect to paid maternity leave, fails to meet that test. It is interesting today that, after a sudden burst of enthusiasm a couple of days ago, we have had not one single question promoting the new paid parental leave by the Leader of the Opposition. Some of the points I will now advance may help explain why they have dropped it like a stone. To begin with, the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition completely repudiates past positions taken by not only him but also the shadow minister in charge of the program. In government the Leader of the Opposition said, ‘I’m dead against paid maternity leave.’ In January this year, the shadow minister, the member for Murray, said that they would be developing a proposal that would not put any tax burden on the business sector. Only about six weeks ago, notoriously, the Leader of the Opposition stated that the opposition committed itself to a promise of no new taxes and no increases in taxes. When confronted with the breaking of that promise yesterday, he said, ‘Sometimes you have to depart from principle.’

The flaws in the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition are quite manifest. He did not consult the business commu-
nity. He did not consult his economics team—the shadow Treasurer and the shadow finance minister—he did not consult his own shadow cabinet and, indeed, one of his own Liberal MPs, when confronted with the proposition by the *Australian*, described it as ‘a typical 1930s socialist impost on big business’ and was then surprised to discover that it was his own leader’s proposal. The detail of the proposal also does not withstand scrutiny. There has been complete confusion about the threshold. We know the threshold involves the figure of $5 million, the tax threshold above which the tax slug hits business. We know the figure is $5 million; we do not quite know what it is $5 million of. Is it turnover? Is it taxable income? Is it profit? We do not quite know, because the Leader of the Opposition has had several different positions.

*Mr Tuckey interjecting—*

*Mr Swan*—Wilson is clarifying it!

*Mr TANNER*—It is good to see that the member for O’Connor is on the job; it is very good to see. If it is taxable income it is about 3,500 companies. If it is tax being paid it is only about 900, 950 or so. There is a big difference between these possibilities. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition cannot quite say when his paid parental leave would start—maybe sometime around 2013. He cannot say whether the tax impost would be permanent or temporary; he described it as a ‘temporary levy’. And he cannot say whether or not he would support the legislation the government is putting to the Senate and to this House to introduce our paid parental leave scheme. He cannot say how he would prevent abuse of the $5 million threshold or unfairness that would flow from it. How would he stop companies from restructuring to avoid the tax? How would he protect companies that are below the threshold, and hit by the tax, from competition from companies that they compete with that are below the threshold? How would he remove the implicit disincentive involved with his tax impost for companies to merge? How would he prevent the tax being passed on to consumers?

I note that the head of the Institute of Public Affairs, prominent Liberal Party figure John Roskam, said the following in response, describing his proposal as disastrous because ‘ultimately tax on businesses’—whether they are big businesses or small businesses—’gets passed through to the consumer, and what we are going to see, as Lindsay Tanner identified, is massive compliance issues’. This is a prominent figure in the Liberal Party agreeing with me. A very prominent figure who has some political and policy substance actually agrees with my assessment and the government’s assessment of the policy merits of the scheme.

Over the last few months we have seen the Leader of the Opposition out there on the quad bike, in the speedos, in the swimming pool. No doubt we are going to see him abseiling and bungee jumping and all those other kinds of things in due course. He should start paying some attention to his day job. If he is going to put forward policy propositions that he expects the government to adopt, that involve big slugs on business and that threaten jobs and the economy, and he proposes to block the government’s own initiative, he needs to do some very serious homework. This will not cut the mustard, and it means he will be a substantial threat to the economy and to the budget, a risk to the future prosperity of this nation.

**Home Insulation Program**

*Mr ABBOTT* (3.01 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. As the Prime Minister has informed the House that Minister Garrett informed him of problems with the Home Insulation Program by letter of 14
August, did he warn in that letter of fire, fraud or safety issues, and will the Prime Minister now release that letter? Further, isn’t this why the Prime Minister will not sack Minister Garrett: because the buck stops with the Prime Minister?

Mr Rudd—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He refers to the then minister’s letter to me of 14 August—

Mr Hunt—He’s still a minister.

Mr Rudd—The then minister responsible for this program. In response to the honourable Leader of the Opposition’s question, I received a letter from the minister, in relation to the Home Insulation Program, proposing increased compliance requirements for the program. On 17 August the relevant cabinet committee considered these compliance matters raised by the minister in his 14 August letter.

Mr Andrews—Yeah, we know that.

Mr Rudd—That is the question the Leader of the Opposition asked. These contained the following elements: (1) physical site inspections prior to giving quotes; (2) increased inspections and scrutiny of trainer qualifications—which goes directly to safety considerations—

Mr Abbott—I raise a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. Did that letter warn of safety problems, and will the Prime Minister release the letter?

The Speaker—The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—In answering the Leader of the Opposition’s question: this correspondence dealt also with, secondly, increased inspections and scrutiny of trainer qualifications; thirdly, increased compliance; and, fourthly, processes for suspending and deregistering non-compliant installers. I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that the relevance of training standards and the relevance of the inspections regime go directly to the question of overall safety considerations associated with the program. Can I say to the Leader of the Opposition, both in relation to these matters and to the cabinet documents that I referred to before, that these obviously are associated with the cabinet process and will be appropriately protected.

Paid Parental Leave

Ms Burke (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Why do Australian families need certainty about paid parental leave?

Ms Macklin—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question, because she understands very well that couples who are planning to have children are making one of the biggest decisions of their lives. I am sure I do not have to remind members of the House, many of us parents ourselves, what it is like to take that step either to start a family or to have another child. For many families, when they are deciding when to start a family or when to have another child, there are many, many critical things that they have to take into account. They have to think about what they are going to do with their employment, with family matters, and with the various financial commitments that have to be considered. The job that we have, of course, is to support families as they make those decisions, not to make their lives more complicated.

In a little over nine months time, Australia’s first paid parental leave scheme is due to start, on 1 January. In case the Leader of the Opposition does not get the subtlety here, that is in just about nine months time. I am sure everybody here can do the maths.

Mr Swan—He’s not very subtle.

Ms Macklin—Maybe not. That means any couple who are thinking about or planning to have a baby want to know what is
going to happen. Are they going to have a paid parental leave scheme that they can depend on on 1 January next year? That is why they need certainty now. They want to know whether or not the paid parental leave scheme is going to be there for them in nine months' time.

The Leader of the Opposition, of course, is threatening to leave parents with nothing. What they know is that this Leader of the Opposition is the biggest risk to families and their certainty. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition does not seem to care that families have been waiting decades for a paid parental leave scheme. We know that the Liberals in government refused to introduce a paid parental leave scheme. We know what the views of the Leader of the Opposition are. It has been very well reported that he said over his dead body would paid parental leave be introduced.

I must say his comments yesterday demonstrate further that he really has no clue about how his latest thought bubble of a scheme is going to happen. He said that he would be amazed if he could not get his scheme up and running by 2013. I would have to say that I would be absolutely amazed if his half-baked scheme had been given any more than half a minute’s thought. There is no question that that applies to some members of his frontbench.

If you have a look at Senator Joyce today, the shadow minister for finance, he said: ‘You know, let’s talk about it once I’ve read it. I don’t like talking about things I haven’t read.’ A sham policy with no detail, no costings, no time line and no deal for Australian families is what the Liberal Party is offering. By contrast, this government has proposed a paid parental leave scheme for the first time that this country has ever seen. It is going to be fair for families and fair for business. Families know that this Leader of the Opposition cannot be trusted on paid parental leave.

**Home Insulation Program**

Mr ABBOTT (3.08 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. What reasons did Minister Garrett give in his letter of 14 August for wanting increased compliance, increased inspections and a process of de-registering installers? I ask the Prime Minister further: did Minister Garrett at any point warn the Prime Minister of the safety issues associated with this disastrous program?

Mr RUDD—I say in response to the Leader of the Opposition that, if you go through the list of correspondence I referred to in my earlier answer, many of them go to training requirements, many of them go to site inspections, and of course these are therefore related to safety and other concerns. The second point I would say is that, as I said to the House the previous time that these matters were debated, there is nothing before me which suggests that the minister did not act in response to the advice that he had received from his department at the time. That is the position I put to the House then; that is the position I put to the House now. Furthermore, I draw the Leader of the Opposition’s attention to the work which is currently being done by Dr Hawke in his review of the implementation of this scheme and to the statement which was delivered to the House yesterday by the minister responsible, Minister Combet, dealing with the wind-up of this scheme and guidelines for any replacement scheme.

I also say in response to the Leader of the Opposition that we intend to get on with the business of accepting responsibility for the problems which have arisen from the implementation of this scheme. Mr Combet has outlined the mechanism by which that will be undertaken. We will not shirk these responsibilities. We intend to get on the job.
Given the fact that it is Thursday, I presume the censure motion is coming soon.

**Paid Parental Leave**

Mr MURPHY (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Dr Emerson. Will the minister advise the House of the impact of paid parental leave proposals on consumer prices?

A government member—No more Mr Nice Guy.

The SPEAKER—Order! The cheer squad will quieten down.

Dr EMERSON—I have been urged that there be no more Mr Nice Guy. I will do my best, Mr Speaker, to be as nice as I possibly can to the opposition. I thank the member for Lowe for his kind question and his concern for consumers in Strathfield, in Burwood and in all the suburbs in the inner-west of Sydney, including—I understand—the good people of Five Dock, and all those consumers about whom the Australian people and the Labor Party care but, of course, about whom the opposition has no interest and no compassion.

In response to the member for Lowe’s question, the government’s paid parental leave scheme is funded from the budget and involves no increase in taxation to be passed on to consumers. On the other hand, the coalition’s paid parental scheme is funded by a 1.7 percentage point slug in the company tax rate for larger companies. As the Treasurer pointed out, this is a $10.8 billion great big new tax to be passed on by large companies. This was confirmed today by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, when Greg Evans said that “the impact of a new tax or levy imposed on businesses cannot be quarantined and these changes end up having an impact on overall prices and employment”.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is right and the coalition is wrong. Yet the opposition leader persists with his argument that Australia’s largest companies would absorb this great big new tax. Hello, Leader of the Opposition? What planet are you on that you believe that Australia’s largest companies—Woolworths, Coles, BP, Shell, Mobil, Caltex—through the goodness of their hearts and in the national interest will absorb this great big new tax and say, ‘We’re not going to pass that onto consumers’?

Obviously the opposition leader is again treating the Australian people like mugs. Every working Australian and every young mother knows that these large companies will pass this tax hike on in the form of higher consumer prices, higher grocery prices, higher petrol prices and higher department store prices. We know that, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry knows that—and guess who else knows it? Well, it is my melancholy duty to advise the House that the member for O’Connor knows that, because he said today that it is a tax on profits and that if Coles and Woolworths intend to put up their prices they will increase their profits and they will therefore pay more tax from that particular arrangement.

I do not quite understand what he is going on about. It is sort of ‘Abbottonomics’ but as far as I can understand, he says there will be this perpetual cycle of tax increases, increased profits and then further price increases. But his neighbour sitting there, the member for Triton, has actually come in and supported, as he should, the member for O’Connor because he said today that it is an impost on industry and that, any impost will ultimately flow through to consumers. That
is a fact. I do not often agree with the member for Triton but on this occasion he is right.

The Speaker—Order! The minister will refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Dr Emerson—The member for Tangney; thank you, Mr Speaker. On this occasion the member for Tangney is right: of course it will be passed on to consumers. By conceding that grocery and petrol prices will go up, the coalition’s mad uncle and the member for Tangney have let the cat out of the bag. They have let the cat out of the bag again—and what a dirty, smelly animal it is! The Leader of the Opposition’s paid parental leave scheme is nothing but a great big new tax on everything.

This is an opposition leader who feigns concern for working families and mothers. It is a funny way to show your concern for working families and mothers—to whack them with a great big new tax on everything. The government’s paid parental leave scheme is affordable and it is responsible. If the opposition leader was fair dinkum he would support our responsible, affordable paid parental leave scheme instead of his great big new tax on everything.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I ask that the minister table that document so I can better read his interpretation of my comments.

The Speaker—Was the minister quoting from a document?

Dr Emerson—I pretty well winged it, Mr Speaker.

Climate Change

Mr Oakeshott (3.16 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. With a reported 1,000 homes at risk from coastal erosion at Old Bar in the Manning Valley, can the Prime Minister provide a status report on government’s response to the tripartisan and seminal report delivered last year by the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts, chaired by the member for Throsby, and provide a reassurance that with recent changes to ministerial responsibilities this issue has not been lost in the rising sea of political challenges that the environment portfolio has faced in recent months?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for Lyne for his question. Since the release of the House committee report the government has sought to work actively on these questions. In November last year the government, through Minister Wong, released the first national assessment of the implications of climate change for Australia’s coasts. That report was entitled Climate change risks to Australia’s coasts. It was the first attempt at continent-wide mapping of the risks posed to residential buildings as a consequence of climate change. The report also went to the challenge that this sort of coastal erosion would present to infrastructure, services and industry. We all know that a number of our road networks hug the coast very closely.

The honourable member also asked a question about further action by the government on this matter. What we have done is create a Coasts and Climate Change Council, to be chaired by Professor Tim Flannery. It is designed to engage with the community and local stakeholders in the lead-up to what will be an important climate change and coastal impact forum which is to be held.

Can I also say in response to the honourable member’s question that we take seriously this challenge for the future, as we do the overall challenge of climate change. The government has released a comprehensive adaptation policy that identifies the role of the federal government in adapting to climate change. It identifies the following priorities: how we deal with natural systems of
national significance; how we deal with prevention, preparedness and response, particularly with regard to natural disasters impacting on a weakened coastline; and the impact on agriculture, water and more broadly on coastal management.

The member should be assured that the government takes this challenge as one of the adaptation implications flowing from climate change very seriously. It potentially affects residences right across Australia. It potentially affects a whole range of infrastructure projects and existing infrastructure right around the country. Therefore the government will have further to say on our action for further preparedness in this area.

This is one of the costs of climate change. It is not unique to Australia. If we go to other countries around the world we see them wrestling with the impact on their coastlines caused by the change in the climate and by the increasing level of the sea. We know in particular of our near neighbours in the Pacific and the impact that it potentially has on the very survival of a number of island states, such as Kiribati, Tuvalu and elsewhere. So, while this is a challenge for Australia, it is also a challenge for the region and the world. The government will continue to discharge its responsibilities in this area.

Tourism

Mr ADAMS (3.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Tourism. Will the minister update the House on the recovery of the Australian tourism industry following setbacks such as the global financial crisis and swine flu?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I appreciate the question from the member for Lyons, a person who represents a large regional seat that is very much dependent on the vibrancy of the tourism industry. With that context I acknowledge the resilience of the industry in the face of many challenges, yet again, over the last 12 months. I also remind the House that, as we come out of the global financial crisis, the industry yet again confronts a huge challenge in the context of the strength of the Australian dollar. We should also have regard for the fact that there are actually good value holidays in Australia. Rather than thinking about having a holiday overseas as we regain confidence economically we should have regard for the fact that there are actually good value holidays in Australia. Rather than thinking about having a holiday overseas as we regain confidence economically we should have regard for staying at home, supporting Australian workers and also supporting the Australian government’s No Leave, No Life campaign, which has broad industry support, given that we currently have accumulated 123 million days of leave, worth $33 billion.

But what of the resilience of the industry over the last 12 months? Last year the industry had to confront a situation in which the global economy actually contracted for the first time since World War II. That effectively meant in normal circumstances a very tough year for an industry that directly employs half a million Australians and represents just under four per cent of Australia’s GDP.

During the course of the year, international tourism in terms of arrivals worldwide actually fell four per cent. Interestingly, visitor arrivals were down six per cent for Europe, five per cent for the Americas and two per cent for the Asia-Pacific. I am pleased to report to the House that the Australian tourism industry actually outperformed the rest of the world with international visitation, which is very important to jobs for ordinary Australians, meeting an arrival rate in 2009 virtually equivalent to that of 2008, at 5.6 million.

Perhaps more importantly it is not just about numbers. Visitor arrivals increased by six per cent and visitor expenditure increased by five per cent. It is this performance on the international tourism front in association with the government’s decisive action in un-
derpinning the Australian economy through our response to the global financial crisis that has done the industry well in securing and supporting Australian employment. By way of example, domestically, Restaurant and Catering Australia estimate that at least $80 million was injected into the restaurant and catering industry from the stimulus package, and they have appropriately given full credit to the government’s economic stimulus package. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has also reported that in the 11 months to November 2009 we saw a 9.5 per cent increase in turnover for restaurants, cafes and take-away food services compared to the same period in 2008.

In terms of employment, I also express my appreciation to the industry itself. Whilst we have done exceptionally well internationally given the global financial crisis, there was a sharp decline, for example, in visitor travel in the Australian community. Yet, despite the global financial crisis, the Australian tourism industry achieved an overall increase of 36,000 jobs in the 12 months to November 2009. I do acknowledge in that context that some of those jobs were changes from full-time to part-time employment because the industry on this occasion resolved, having invested in the training of their workforce—many of whom are women—to go out of their way to retain their employment given the challenge of actually keeping people when we think about the better wages and conditions that are currently available in competitive industries such as the resources and energy projects around Australia at the moment.

I also note in passing that this is an industry that represents a huge number of jobs for women workers. They are not historically highly paid workers and they are a group of workers that will be tremendously disappointed if the opposition does not get out of the government’s way when it comes to putting in place a guaranteed minimum opportunity for paid parental leave in Australia. It is about time the opposition understood not only the importance of the tourism industry from the point of view of employment in Australia but also the importance of the safety net for women workers in the Australian tourism industry, who have long sought decisive government action to extend to them paid parental leave, just like we extended superannuation, in a previous government, to workers who historically did not have opportunities for what the better off in the Australian community expect as part of their employment packages. I simply say to the Australian tourism industry: thanks for a job well done in supporting the Australian government initiatives to shore up employment in a tough global situation.

Hospitals

Mr ABBOTT (3.26 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How can the Prime Minister say that the efficient casemix price of public hospital procedures will be set by an independent body under his health reform policy while also maintaining that government funding for public hospitals will not need to increase over the forward estimates period? How can the Australian people trust the government to fix public hospitals when the government cannot successfully manage to give away pink batts for free?

Mr RUDD—It is pretty interesting when the Leader of the Opposition asks a question about health and demonstrates that he does not understand the first thing about casemix funding. He does not understand the first thing about activity based funding. I would have thought that, having been the Minister for Health and Ageing for four or five years, he would demonstrate an elementary level of understanding. I will say to the Leader of the Opposition that why we are bringing about fundamental reform to the health and hospi-
tal system is as follows. We will not in the future be providing blank cheques as he did to state and territory governments in the hope that something might happen in the actual delivery of services on the ground. We are proposing to introduce, by contrast, activity based funding which enables the government to directly pay local hospital networks for the actual hospital services that they deliver.

This is a reform which working families want on the ground because it enables them to respond to this certainty of budgetary supply in order to increase the hospital services delivered on the ground. The Australian people have been saying to the government that they do not have enough hospital beds, doctors or nurses and that they are sick and tired of the waste, duplication and overlap that currently characterises our system. One of the reasons we have this waste, duplication and overlap—something which the Leader of the Opposition, if he were faintly interested in reform, would have done something about—

Dr Southcott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The question was about the independent umpire and the hospital funding over the forward estimates. The Prime Minister has not addressed this in his answer.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister is aware of his responsibilities to be relevant to the question. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—The response we have had from the medical profession, from nurses right across the country, has been to get behind this reform for the nation because they want more resources to go to front-line health and hospital services, not into bureaucracies in state capitals across the country. That is what the people of Australia are calling out for.

In response to the member for Boothby’s intervention, coming on top of the Leader of the Opposition’s question, can I say as follows: (1) bring in activity based funding and (2) make sure that the Australian government takes on its shoulders, for the first time in Australia’s history, the burden of becoming the dominant funder of the public hospital system of Australia. We are for the first time in our history becoming the dominant funder of the capital needs of Australia’s public hospital system, for the first time becoming the dominant funder of the equipment needs of Australia’s public hospital system and for the first time becoming the dominant funder of the research and teaching needs of the public hospital system of Australia.
People want an end to business as usual. The Leader of the Opposition, who had five years as health minister, is content with the status quo. He is content with not changing a thing. He thinks the system is just good enough. I say to the Leader of the Opposition and to the member for Boothby: (1) we take on this reform to deliver money directly to the coalface, (2) we take on our shoulders the burden of long-term growth in the system and (3) as the minister for health and others have indicated, we have further say on additional growth in the system in the future as well. This is in stark contrast to a Leader of the Opposition who ripped $1 billion out of the public hospital system of Australia and stands here and pretends that he never, ever did it.

Small Business: Superannuation

Mr RAGUSE (3.31 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law. Will the minister update the House on the progress of the government’s small business superannuation—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who has been warned, should be asked to withdraw that comment.

The SPEAKER—There was an earlier comment that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will withdraw.

Ms Julie Bishop—I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr RAGUSE—My question is to the Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law. Will the minister update the House on the progress of the government’s small business superannuation clearing house measure? Minister, what risks are there to this important election commitment being rolled out to help relieve small business of a significant compliance burden?

Mr BOWEN—I thank the honourable member for his question and recognise his long experience as a small business person. In opposition, the Labor Party promised to reduce the paperwork burden for small business in making payments to superannuation funds and we are acting on that commitment. Currently small businesses often have difficulty in making their payments to superannuation funds when they have to make payments to various different funds for various different employees, creating a red-tape nightmare. Pending passage of legislation that will shortly be before the Senate, a free superannuation clearing house will operate from 1 July, implementing that election commitment.

Medicare has been chosen by the government to run the small business clearing house because it is well placed, as one of the government’s best service delivery agencies with significant electronic and payment processing capacity, to deliver that service while ensuring the privacy of information and the security of funds. If we get this legislation implementing the election commitment through the parliament, then we will be helping to ease the compliance burden for small business and letting them do what they do best, which is to get on with the job and employ more Australians.

When I announced last year that Medicare would run the small business superannuation clearing house, it was a decision which received strong endorsement from the superannuation and small business sectors. The chief executive of the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia, Pauline Vamos, said:

This will lower costs for both employers and funds and allow more employees to exercise choice.
Just last week, the CEO of COSBOA, the small business peak group, said:

We think the legislation will improve the efficiency of business-to-government dealings and, as I said earlier, will help improve small business compliance with their super obligations more generally.

Even today we saw a significant agreement being announced between three of Australia’s largest superannuation administrators to make it easier to roll over funds between different superannuation funds. The administrators make it clear in their statement that the agreement flows from the opportunity created by the government decision to appoint Medicare to run the small business clearing house. So this is a good policy—a pro-small business policy. It has important flow-on benefits for efficiency and employment.

I am asked what risks there are to implementing this policy and the risks lie opposite. It might seem hard to believe that the opposition would block a small business measure, but they are planning to do so in the Senate. A pro-small business measure is being stopped by the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite. The business community has the right to ask what they have done to deserve this Leader of the Opposition. One day he is whacking a tax on business and the next day he is standing in the way of a measure to reduce small business compliance costs.

On this issue, the opposition have reached new heights of hypocrisy. Yesterday in this House, my shadow minister, the member for Cowper, criticised the government for taking so long to implement this superannuation clearing house and then said he would oppose it in the other place. They cannot even get their stories straight in one sentence, let alone one speech or one day. They criticise us for taking too long and then say, ‘By the way, we’re not going to support it.’

This all appears to be part of the Leader of the Opposition’s cunning plan. He has got it all worked out. They are going to use their numbers in the Senate to block our implementation of election commitments and then criticise us for not implementing election commitments. He has got it all sorted! He must take the Australian people for mugs. The Leader of the Opposition takes the Australian people for fools.

The former Prime Minister, John Howard, promised to reduce the red-tape burden on small business by 50 per cent, and he failed. He did not achieve that election promise. But it is not too late for the opposition. They can get out of the way and they can support the government in supporting small business. They can get out of the way and let the government implement this election commitment. If they do not, the small business community of Australia is entitled to conclude that the Leader of the Opposition puts his rashness, his obstructionism and his cheap politics in front of the interests of Australian small business.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr PYNE (3.37 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education. I refer the minister to the case of the Tyalgum Public School in New South Wales, which received a library off the back of a semitrailer, under Building the Education Revolution, at a cost of $850,000. When the library was offloaded it did not fit the foundations that had been laid for it and was, and remains, unusable. How can the Australian people trust a government that cannot deliver to a school a prefabricated library that fits its foundations to reform Australia’s public hospital system?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow minister for education for his question. I would note, of course, that since the launch of the national curriculum the shadow minister for
education has not inquired about it. Maybe that is because he is aware that teachers across the country are blogging about the hollowness of his response to the national curriculum—about how truly galling it was to see someone treat a major national reform with such contempt that all he did was have a staff member work out the word ‘Indigenous’ and then criticise the curriculum.

Ms GILLARD—In answer to the shadow minister’s question, can I say this and say it very clearly to him. I do not think you, Mr Speaker, are going to be surprised when I say this, although maybe the shadow minister is going to be surprised, but I do not myself deliver demountable buildings. I do not myself lay concrete foundations. That is true; he is correct in that. I am not individually building each of the 24,000 projects around the country. What we as a government are doing, through our guidelines and our auditing systems, is monitoring the rollout of Building the Education Revolution. When there are problems—and there was a problem with the construction of the foundation at the school that the shadow minister mentions—then, of course, they are rectified. That problem is being rectified by the contractor who made the error. That is being rectified at no additional cost to the government. That is what one would expect a contractor who has made an error to do. That would happen if one was engaged in Building the Education Revolution, if one was a businessperson engaged in building a commercial building or if one was a household who was building a home renovation. An error was made and that error is being rectified without an additional cost to the government.

It does seem to me to be really bordering on the pathetic that, on a day in which this nation received unemployment numbers of 5.3 per cent as a result of the economic stimulus that enabled hundreds of thousands of Australians to go home at the end of a working week with a pay packet in their hands, the best the opposition can do is point to one error by one contractor, out of 24,000 projects in more than 9,000 schools, that is not costing one extra dollar. It says everything about the shadow minister for education, everything about the hollowness of this opposition. They do not care about jobs. They do not care about health. They do not care about education. They do not care about cost pressures on families. And of course their greatest achievement this week is Tony’s new tax on everything a family buys.

Mr HAyes (3.42 pm)—My question is to the Leader of the House. Would the Leader of the House outline the importance of orderly processes in ensuring the timely passage of legislation through the parliament?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Werriwa for his question, and indeed I am pleased to inform the House that the division that we had just before question time, where once again those opposite opposed the legislation—this time put forward by the Minister for Resources and Energy—was the 44th piece of legislation passed through this House this year already. Indeed, last year this chamber passed 207 pieces of legislation—the highest number of bills this century, setting a new benchmark for this century at its beginning. But it is not surprising because this government has a big agenda for the nation.

However, when bills pass this House we do have a problem getting them adopted by the parliament as a whole. Indeed, some 37
bills have been rejected by the Senate. Thirty-seven pieces of legislation have been either directly rejected or passed with amendments that were unacceptable to the House of Representatives. And that does not include the 18 bills that we had to reintroduce into the House of Representatives and which had to go back a second time to the other place. The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party have the most obstructionist attitude in the Senate in three decades. Indeed, it is a fact that last year the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party blocked four times as many bills as in any year for 30 years. That is what is occurring from those opposite.

I went into politics to make a difference. In 2007 the government promoted a program of making a positive agenda. Tories go into politics to block—particularly those opposite. They are only defined by what they oppose. In government, the current Leader of the Opposition ripped a billion dollars out of hospitals, he froze places for GPs, and now that he is in opposition he has been elected on a platform, in his own words, of simply opposing. He told 2GB on 11 January:

Now sure, come election time people are entitled to know what we would do differently but at this stage of the political cycle our job is to ferociously criticise and where necessary oppose the Government. I mean, if in doubt our job is to oppose.

PHI—oppose. Dental reform—oppose. Midwives—oppose. CPRS—oppose. Youth Allowance—oppose. Electoral reform—oppose. Paid paternity leave—oppose. NBN—oppose. Those opposite are simply led by the Dr No of Australian politics; they are simply defined by what they are opposed to. That shows how petty and how untrustworthy the Leader of the Opposition is—petty, untrustworthy and bloody-minded in his opposition to the reforms of this government.

Mr Hunt—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. We also oppose pink batts.

The SPEAKER—The member for Flinders will leave the chamber for one hour, under standing order 94(a).

The member for Flinders then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the House has the call. He will start to bring his answer to a conclusion.

Mr ALBANESE—Thank you, Mr Speaker. They did indeed oppose the economic stimulus plan; they did indeed oppose Building the Education Revolution. They opposed the increased spending for 14 roads; they opposed the rail safety program—they opposed the $1.2 billion to the ARTC; they opposed support for public housing; they opposed the tripling of the black spots program—

Mr Laming—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. This question went specifically to the word ‘obstruction’ and not ‘opposition’. Legislation can only be obstructed by senators—

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

Mr Laming interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Laming interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Laming interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Laming interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Bowman. I call the Leader of the House.
Mr ALBANESE—Obstruction and opposition—they are the same thing, particularly when you look at those opposite. There are currently 51 pieces of legislation that have been carried by this House that are sitting over in the Senate waiting to be dealt with—51 pieces of legislation. This morning, when I debated the Manager of Opposition Business on Sky News and this issue came up, he said on the CPRS, ‘Why didn’t you negotiate with the Greens?’ Well, we negotiated in good faith and did a deal, in good faith, with the other major political party in this country. They walked away from it on the basis that the Leader of the Opposition was elected by his party on a platform of not standing for anything, of not worrying about policy but simply of opposing for opposition’s sake.

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

WORLD VISION

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (3.49 pm)—Mr Speaker, I want to take the opportunity on indulgence to condemn the brutal and senseless attack on World Vision in Mansehra in Pakistan yesterday. Yesterday, gunmen entered the offices of World Vision and, in execution style, shot six staff members, all of whom were Pakistani. World Vision Australia is of course very well known and regarded in Australia for its good work in our region and internationally, and there are close links between World Vision Australia and World Vision International. There are a small number of Australians who work for World Vision in Pakistan. Fortunately, they were not involved in this terrible event. We extend our sympathy and our condolences to the families of the slain individuals. We extend our sympathy and condolences to their friends in World Vision International and World Vision Australia.

Development assistance workers, whether they are government officers, whether they are officers from non-government organisations or whether they are employed by international institutions like the World Bank or indeed United Nations agencies, do good deeds in dangerous circumstances, often at risk to themselves, seeking to help people who are less well off than themselves and help nations who are less well off than we are. Any attack on development assistance workers is contemptible. We condemn this brutal attack. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the families of the slain, we stand shoulder to shoulder with Pakistan and we stand shoulder to shoulder with World Vision and international development assistance workers generally.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (3.51 pm)—On indulgence, Mr Speaker, I rise to add my remarks to those of the Minister for Foreign Affairs in relation to the brutal and senseless killing of World Vision workers in north-west Pakistan. The execution style killings have been rightly condemned around the world. Six aid workers were killed, including two women, and others were injured. World Vision workers have been in this region since October 2005 as a result of an earthquake that occurred at that time.

The Geneva convention protects humanitarian workers, yet we have seen in the last decade an increasing number of brutal attacks on aid workers. That should be condemned. The opposition joins with the government in offering condolences to those affected by this tragedy and condemns these senseless acts.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time

Mr DUTTON (3.52 pm)—Mr Speaker, I have two questions for you. The first goes to your ruling in question time today in relation to a denial of the call I was seeking. I ask
you whether under standing order 86 there is an obligation on the Speaker to acknowledge a member or whether that is a discretionary call. I would ask you to respond to that. Secondly, I would ask you to review the tapes of question time today. A consistent point of order that we have taken has been the delay in your asking the Prime Minister to resume his seat when a member of the opposition has risen to make a point of order. Clearly, it facilitates a completion of the answer by the Prime Minister and delays a call being sought by a member of the opposition, and I would ask you to review the tapes to see whether or not that is a practice which is occurring. I am sure it is not a conscious practice, but nonetheless it is one that has been noted on a number of occasions. I wonder whether, once you have reviewed those tapes, you could report back to the parliament.

The SPEAKER—As I have indicated from the outset of the parliament, it was not my intention to take questions about procedural matters that had occurred, but it would appear that it might assist if I were to make some remarks about the two matters that have been raised by the member for Dickson. Not giving him the call is something that is rare. It is not something that I would intend to use to a great extent but sparingly. I will not be reviewing the tape about the incident that he raised because my actions were as he has outlined them.

As I have indicated in the past, if I believe that somebody is rising for a point of order—and on this occasion it was the member for Flinders—the minister with the call answering the question is likely to be finishing the answer, I will allow that. So he is correct. I do not have to review the tape. That is what happened on this occasion. But I simply say to him that, even if I took the point of order, the answer would still be completed and there would be delay. I am very comfortable in the way in which I have protected members’ rights to rise and make points of order. As I said, I hope my action towards the member for Dickson will continue to be very rare, but they have precedence in this place, where I believe that we can continue the business without value adding by getting into a procedural debate when I was confident that I had upheld the standing and sessional orders and the precedent. The member for Dickson will remember that I had a response to a tweet of his about this particular point. I do not believe that I am giving any advantage to somebody who is completing their answer because, after the point of order is raised, it is very difficult for me then to prevent that answer being completed.

Chamber Photograph

Mr KERR (3.57 pm)—I also have a question for you, Mr Speaker. Has your attention been drawn to an uncharitably titled article in today’s Sunshine Coast Daily which reads ‘Slipper denies speech snooze’ and the accompanying photograph. In particular, the article claims:

A photograph of Mr Slipper, taken from a mobile phone on the Opposition side of parliament, was sent anonymously to the Daily yesterday afternoon.

Mr Speaker, can you advise the House whether it is within the standing orders for a member of the opposition to photograph another member of the opposition? Given the angle of the photograph, can you or your advisers identify who has taken what certainly appears to be—

The SPEAKER—The member for Denison will resume his seat. I will be taking no action on this matter. It is for any aggrieved member to have raised this with me and I am not entertaining taking the matter any further.
PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.57 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr ABBOTT—I do, Mr Speaker, and most grievously.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr ABBOTT—in question time today and on numerous previous occasions, members opposite have claimed that I—and I am quoting more or less what they say—’ripped a billion dollars out of hospital funding’. I seek to make two points. First of all, rather trivially, I was not the relevant minister at the time of the 2003 budget. Secondly, and more importantly, I am now reading from page 179 of Budget Paper No. 2 of 2003-04, which states:

The funding for 2003-04 to 2007-08—
this is the health care agreement, public hospital funding—
represents an increase of $10 billion over the last agreements.

This demonstrates that the claims repeatedly made opposite are simply not true. They are lies.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Opposition has completed his personal explanation.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (3.59 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr TUCKEY—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr TUCKEY—in question time today, the member for Rankin misrepresented my comments at this morning’s doorstep as a criticism of the coalition’s parental leave policy. What I said this morning was that, by comparison, the ETS is a tax that is paid even if you are going broke and that the parental leave levy is no different in terms of tax administration and approximate rate than the Medicare levy, except that its threshold is $5 million of taxable income and as an income tax it does not front-end prices.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (4.00 pm)—For the benefit of the House, I table the page that the Leader of the Opposition referred to in his personal explanation, which clearly shows that the government in 2003 reduced funding—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has tabled—

Ms ROXON—a billion dollars less than even—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has tabled the document. The minister will resume her seat.

Ms ROXON—No, I am not—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! At this point in time, I think we have moved on from the minister’s ability to add to an answer.

Ms ROXON—I am also tabling a second document, which I am, as a minister, allowed to do.

The SPEAKER—The minister can table the documents but she cannot really debate the tabling.

Ms ROXON—No, but I need to tell you what the document is that I am tabling.

The SPEAKER—No. The minister has tabled one document, and the minister is about to table another document—

Ms ROXON—Yes. I am tabling a second document, which shows the Leader of the Opposition’s own words admitting to this.
Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume her seat. The member for Cowper will resume his seat. I take it that the minister is approaching the dispatch box to table a document. She can table the document, but she cannot debate the document.

Ms ROXON—I have tabled the two documents.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Usually you are of more assistance, Leader of the House. But the dogs have barked and the caravan has moved on!

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have a question for you in relation to the document tabled.

The SPEAKER—It can only be a point of order.

Mr Dutton—The point of order is: is it within the standing orders for the minister to table a document which is a half-ripped piece of paper, a transcript? This is not a Treasury document.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat. A document, having been tabled, is available for members to look at and make any assessment about that they like.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (4.02 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Australian Law Reform Commission—Report (No. 112)—Secrecy laws and open government in Australia.

Ministerial statement—Green loans program—Senator Wong, Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Health and Infrastructure Programs

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

The Government’s failure to properly manage its health and infrastructure programs

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

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

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (4.03 pm)—Four young men dead, 105 house fires, 1,000 electrified roofs and probably many thousand more, 240,000 dangerous or substandard insulations, up to 30,000 lost jobs, hundreds of small businesses heading for liquidation, three companies so far charged with fraud and hundreds more to come, at least 21 explicit warnings of danger ignored, a $450 million bill to fix up the mess, and estimations of compensation claims perhaps as high as $1 billion—that is the tragic tally of personal, environmental and economic disasters created by just one of the Rudd Labor government’s programs. And the government expect the Australian people to give them a second term, to give them more opportunities to administer programs in this kind of shoddy way! They expect us to give them more opportunities to affect the lives of thousands of Australians in an adverse way.
They criticise us for obstructing their legislative program. They expect us to support their other grand plans, like the uncosted National Broadband Network—what a debacle that is! Before the election it was going to provide, for $4.7 billion, a high-speed broadband fibre-to-the-node system to 98 per cent of Australia. The first connections were going to be made by Christmas 2008. Now it is only 90 per cent of Australians who are to be served. Two million people have been excluded, mostly in regional areas, including every town under 1,000 people, and the cost is $43 billion. What is more, nobody wants to build it. There is no plan. All they have got is a plan to belt up Telstra to a pulp.

The reality is that this government has failed. It cannot administer programs. It has failed to deliver, and Australians are suffering from its incompetence. I do not think I have ever in my life seen a program more poorly managed or so disastrously administered as Labor’s Home Insulation Program. Yet not one person has actually lost their job over this appalling debacle. The Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts is still drawing the same wage. So is the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Government Service Delivery. So is the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. So is the Prime Minister. The minister for the environment has been asked to take the rap. This ‘first-class minister’ has been hit with a supercharged feather, but all he is doing is playing in a smaller chook pen. The reality is that he has had to take the blame, and he must be looking with angry eyes at the ministers sitting alongside him who are getting off scot-free. The blame certainly lies higher up, amongst ministers who were part of this so-called project control group that had responsibility for the devising of the program early in the piece.

In question time on 24 February, when asked about the government’s insulation program, the Prime Minister acknowledged that ‘in the early part of 2009 an initial risk assessment was done for the cabinet’. So cabinet arranged to have a risk assessment done—according to the words of the Prime Minister—in February 2009. There was an additional assessment in April—the Minter Ellison report, which has been ignored. In fact, the minister said that he did not even see it for 10 months, in spite of weekly reports from his department on the progress.

The project control group should have been well and truly aware that they were acting with a program which had considerable dangers. In fact, on 24 February in this House, the Prime Minister said, in commenting on the insulation program:

I also draw the honourable member’s attention to the fact that in 2008, against an industry that at that stage was rolling out something in the vicinity of 50,000 to 75,000 retrofitted insulations each year, the number of fires was, I am advised, something in the order of 83.

The Prime Minister was talking about 83 fires in the insulation installation; yet here he was ramping up a program 10 times bigger—100-fold—and no measures were taken to ensure that there would not be 100 times more fires as a result of the program they were implementing. The government are culpable in this area. They were warned. They knew that there were serious issues associated with the development of a program of this nature, but the Prime Minister and other senior ministers took no action to intervene. Now there is a tally of death and destruction which is plain for us all to see.

It is also a major disappointment that there has been such a trashing of confidence in the roof insulation industry—a legitimate trade which has effectively been ruined. Stefanie Balogh, commenting in the Courier-Mail, wrote:
The Rudd Government’s $2.45 billion home insulation program ended up turning into a magnet for every cowboy in town.

It was certainly a magnet for rorts. Let us look at a few of the rorts that have so far been identified—and there are undoubtedly many more. There were really no quotes below $1,600 ever given, even though the average cost for roof insulation was only $1,200. The government woke up to that months and months later and reduced the amount of the rebate. But, again, there was never going to be a quote below that number because the government were prepared to give out $1,600 without even asking any questions.

The government have clearly paid scores of claims—maybe hundreds—for jobs that were never done, for households that do not even exist. Two quotes were required but often they came from the same company. There was quote collusion between companies to share the jobs between them. Quotes were made by using Google Earth. People did not even bother to inspect the houses; they just found the house on Google Earth and then sent a quote in the mail. They used substandard insulation—batts cut in two. Companies were passing themselves off to householders as being government agencies. Fly-by-night installers were leaving botched or difficult jobs incomplete. No-one took any action to intervene. And the companies responsible for dodgy insulation are now being told that they can inspect their own work and repair it.

The opposition brought to the attention of the House in question time a couple of weeks ago the plight of the Smith family of Gympie. Mr Smith said that the installers cut rolls of fibre insulation the wrong size and left the cut rolls uninstalled in his roof cavity. He said that the installers fell through the plaster ceiling above his bedroom wardrobe, that they behaved in a threatening manner when he became upset and that they suggested that they sort it out at the pub when his wife ordered them out of the house. Two months later, the installers had not been in contact to repair the damage. The Smiths called the police, who were also called to investigate another incident, apparently involving the same people. This is the kind of behaviour that the government was subsidising through its ill-considered and inappropriately supervised program.

Electricians had been warning for ages that the use of foil insulation in homes could be dangerous. Kyle McKennon said that he always believed the use of foil insulation in homes was a disaster waiting to happen. He said:

From the moment I heard about this the alarm bells started going.

David Benjamin, from Kawanna Electrical at Buddina, said:

The whole concept of putting a conductor in a ceiling cavity is absurd.

Mr Benjamin went on to say that he had received numerous calls from people who had had foil insulation installed and were now concerned about their safety. Is it any wonder? One suggested that the minister might like to get up in the roof and put his finger on the insulation to test for himself whether or not their roof was electrified.

Stan Dennis, an electrician from Nanango with 50 years experience working in the electrical industry, said that if anyone has aluminium foil in their ceiling, they should get rid of it immediately. David Elston, an electrician from Cooroy, called my office to warn that rodents chew cables in the roofs of homes. He stated that even if there was an inspection done one day and considered okay, the next day a cable could be chewed by a rodent, making the house unsafe. An article in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* reported:
Charlie Gardener ... said he was angered after visiting several retirement villages where residents’ homes had been fitted with the potentially dangerous foil which he believes “doesn’t even work”.

Several months ago he wrote to the Federal Government about his concerns, but never received a report.

The government were asleep at the wheel. They were not on watch. They were not doing what they should have been doing when supervising a massive multibillion dollar program—a program which has had such disastrous consequences. The editor of the Fraser Coast Chronicle wrote in an editorial:

Before the program was introduced I got a quote to insulate my home in Grafton and it came in at $1700. After the rebate scheme was announced I got new quotes. Both were more than $2200. The rorts were happening every day and the government were doing nothing about it.

Now, of course, the government have set up a complaints inquiry line. You can ring a number to get some assistance. Caulfield man David Wise, 78, was reported in the Herald Sun as saying that when he rang the government hotline yesterday he was told it could take five years to get his insulation checked. And the minister made some similar comments this morning when he said that he had no idea at all how long it was going to actually take to inspect all of these roofs and all of these insulations.

The government has now passed this program on to the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. I do not think that department has the kind of record that would give you any confidence it was going to be able to fix the mess. Today, the parliament has given the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency another $20 million for office space. Some of that is going to be taken over by the people who are supposed to fix this bungled program, but it is also going to house 150 bureaucrats who have been employed to administer the government’s proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. What Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme? It is not there, yet 150 bureaucrats are moving into $20 million worth of new office space so they can administer the program. The Treasurer acknowledged on 4BC in Brisbane that the legislation was not going to pass. We have had other ministers going around the press gallery saying that the CPRS is dead.

The public servant who heads the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency really belled the cat. The Canberra Times reported that he was blunt when talking to the staff on hearing the news that he was to administer this program and said that the public servants responsible for dealing with this insulation debacle have been through hell. He said:

You have not had ... the resources that you needed to do the job and even if you had, there are inherent policy design flaws ...

He said that he did not feel he could do much better and said:

It’s not like the DCC has any expertise in this area. DCC is not a program manager ...

The government have now handed the responsibility for fixing the mess to a department that says straight out: ‘We’ve got no expertise in this area. We know nothing about it.’ This has been a bungled program from beginning to end. Mr Garrett has taken some of the heat but the reality is that the whole government are culpable for incompetent administration and they are showing no signs yet that they are actually going to do anything to fix things.

But that is not the end of this government’s inabilities. A government which could not give away home insulation during a heatwave is now asking us to trust them to run the hospitals. The New South Wales La-
bor government have already produced a list of 117 district hospitals, community surgeries, psychiatric facilities, multipurpose hospitals and nursing homes that they believe will close as a result of the Rudd Labor government’s new hospitals program. New South Wales have named their hospitals that are on Labor’s closure list. Why don’t Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory do exactly the same? We need to know who is on the hit list. Which hospitals are going to take the hit because of Labor’s proposed new arrangements?

Labor’s health plan will not produce one extra dollar for health. Simply rebadging some of the states’ GST money and calling it federal money does not make the amount of money available for hospitals any greater. And they are going to set up an extra level of bureaucracy. What hospital services are going to be cut? We were told yesterday that the Prime Minister is going to reward hospitals that produce good results. Where is that money coming from? What services are going to be cut to enable those rewards to be paid?

No-one should ever have any confidence in a health scheme administered by this Prime Minister. When he was running Queensland, to use his own words, as chief adviser to the Goss Labor government, he abolished local hospital boards—the very boards he is now proposing to build. He also closed hundreds of hospital beds across the state. He has form. He has a record in managing hospitals and it is a disastrous record. He began the demise of the great Queensland health system and he should not be trusted with the national health system. (Time expired)

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (4.18 pm)—It has been a most interesting contribution to this MPI from the Leader of the National Party. We have had a tirade of, I think, 17 or 18 minutes against the government’s comprehensive plans to deal with the problems that we have outlined in the Home Insulation Program and about three minutes on health which I suggest gives us a very good idea of the opposition’s priorities when it comes to one of the most important reform agendas before us today.

As the Leader of the National Party knows full well, about this time yesterday afternoon the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency provided the House with a comprehensive ministerial statement of how he plans to deal with the problems in the Home Insulation Program. In his usual forensic fashion, he comprehensively went through all of the problems and was completely open and direct about the number of houses that will be inspected as a result.

Interestingly, just in the last couple of days I spoke to an installer in my area in northern Sydney—a legitimate operator; someone who has been in the business for about 10 years—who runs a company called Safe and Sound Insulation. He talked about some of the problems that he has had and it was encouraging to hear him say to me, ‘I want to be part of the solution.’ I have passed that information on to the minister’s office. This is what we intend to do: work with those legitimate players in the industry and deal with the problems in the Home Insulation Program.

I think that the Leader of the Nationals has kept us here on false pretences. What is the title of this matter of public importance? The title is:

The Government’s failure to properly manage its health and infrastructure programs.
Maybe this is accidental, but I think there is word missing from the title of this debate and it is ‘former’. I think it is as clear as day that when we talk about a ‘failure to properly manage health and infrastructure’, it is the former government that is inexplicably linked with abject failure to manage health and to manage infrastructure. You know, it is a failure we on this side of the House have to contend with every day in government. It is a failure that those opposite should reflect on.

As I have said before, I think the members opposite should reflect long and hard on the sorry legacy of their 12 lazy years in government. While the bounty rolled in from the years of prosperity, members opposite sat lazily on this side, of course, and did not do the heavy lifting on infrastructure. I will come to that issue first.

I do think the Leader of the Nationals has a hide to bring up this debate today when job figures show our unemployment rate effectively holding steady at just over five per cent. The national rate of unemployment is 5.3 per cent, while many of our major trading partners struggle with an unemployment rate of 10 per cent. The United States has 9.7 per cent unemployment, the United Kingdom has 7.8 per cent and in many of the European countries—the Euro zone—it is 9.9 per cent. If we look at the figures for full-time work, today’s ABS figures show that full-time employment actually increased by 11,400 jobs. That is full-time employment. As the Deputy Prime Minister has pointed out, our steady result in the move to full-time employment shows something very important. On this side of the House we all give employers great credit. Employers around the country who worked with their staff and unions to keep people in jobs can now begin to raise the number of hours available to workers each week. This is what I hear across the country from employers. It has been an extraordinary collective effort by them. It just goes to show, on a day such as this, how out of touch the opposition are when they can come into the House today and try to make a lie of those figures by denying that the Rudd government has kept our economy growing by investing in infrastructure—and, foremost, it has kept Australians working through the global financial crisis.

There is not a shred of a premise for the Leader of the Opposition in this misguided, muddle-headed debate that he has brought on this afternoon when today’s job figures show the national unemployment rate is 5.3 per cent. That is positive news in relative terms, but of course we do not for a minute take for granted the more than 128,000 Australians who have become unemployed since the onset of the global financial crisis after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in October 2008, nor do we forget the total number of unemployed Australians still sits at just over 615,000.

As the Deputy Prime Minister has pointed out, there are still pockets of very high unemployment in Far North Queensland and in western Sydney. The government has many programs that are addressing problems in those areas and indeed in the other 20 priority areas where we have local employment coordinators working intensely with partners to ensure that there is a good employment plan and people are able to get access to training programs. The Rudd government continues to support jobs with stimulus and with priority employment programs in all of these areas. Indeed, when I crisscross the country and I talk to local government shires across the country, mayors, deputy mayors and councillors say to me just how vital the stimulus has been at every level. Whether it is the regional and local community infrastructure program, whether it is the $1 billion we have provided to every shire across the country, or whether it is the stimulus infrastructure funding we have provided to large-
and medium-scale projects right across the
country, the result is a continued endorse-
ment by employers of the government strat-
ey to provide stimulus to the Australian
economy during the GFC—a strategy which
is being gradually wound down as the econ-
omy improves and as jobs growth returns.

I have talked on this topic before when the
Leader of the Nationals has led off in a de-
bate. I do not think he gets infrastructure,
because the last time he brought on one of
these debates on infrastructure I reminded
him of his own failure in his electorate of
Wide Bay—specifically for those people
travelling on sections of the Bruce Highway,
a dangerous stretch of road if ever there was
one, and the Leader of the Nationals of
course studiously ignored this during his
years in government.

Mr Perrett—He was the minister!

Ms McKEW—That is right; indeed he
was. This is in spite of his own admission:
‘This is a dreadfully accident prone section,
rated the worst piece of the highway’—

Mr Truss—You said this last time!

Ms McKEW—I am reminding the Leader
of the Nationals—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE
Burke)—The Leader of the Nationals has
had his turn.

Ms McKEW—Thank you, Madam Dep-
uty Speaker. I am reminding the Leader
of the Nationals, because there seems to have
been a little bit of amnesia. I think this is a
tradition of his—his somewhat silly Thurs-
day afternoon debates. I do not want to
sound repetitive, but let us say that those
sitting opposite need to be told things a few
times before they sink in. I am sure it will be
a case of deja vu all over again. I am pleased
to tell the House that, since the last time I
spoke on this, I have been in Gympie to open
the $70 million upgrade of the Bruce High-
way that goes through Gympie. The Leader
of the Nationals is nodding and saying,
‘That’s right.’

Mr Truss—Thank you for coming!

Ms McKEW—My pleasure, and a lovely
part of the world it is. The works were fin-
ished three months ahead of schedule. Let us
go to unemployment again. I have just talked
about the fact that we have an unemployment
rate of 5.3 per cent. Why do we have that
figure? The widening of the Bruce Highway
in Gympie generated 164 direct and indirect
jobs during the construction phase, and that
upgrade is just one of any number of projects
funded as part of the Rudd government’s
record $2.6 billion investment in the Bruce
Highway.

While I was there, I took the opportunity
to inspect the progress on the Cooroy to
Curra, section B component, of the Bruce
Highway upgrade, and the earthworks there
are quite something to behold. The builders
there, as the Leader of the Nationals would
know, are the large construction group the
Abigroup. They have made huge progress.
This is a $613 million upgrade that is jointly
funded with the Queensland government. As
you know, that is one of the busiest stretches
of highway. It currently carries around
15,000 vehicles a day, and these works will
ensure that the highway can meet increasing
demand.

In contrast to the opposition, the Rudd
government is determined to improve safety
on the Bruce Highway. I know the Leader of
the Nationals will be interested in this, be-
cause we have just heard from him about the
importance of safety and he has talked to us
about a tally of death and destruction. As the
Leader of the Nationals well knows, there is
a tally of death and destruction when it
comes to—

Consideration interrupted.
ADJOURNMENT

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

That the House do now adjourn.

Banjara Medical Centre

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (4.30 pm)—I was delighted to open the Banjara Medical Centre in my electorate of McPherson, a specialist amphetamine treatment clinic. The centre is located at Mirikai—a name synonymous with innovation and excellence in the drug and alcohol sector and run by the Gold Coast Drug Council. Mirikai means a ‘place of peace’ and banjara means ‘good’ or ‘feeling well’.

The centre received a grant of just under half a million dollars under the Amphetamine Type Stimulants Grants Program of the Department of Health and Ageing. The grant has expanded the capacity of Mirikai to provide services and facilities for a medical service and support team to treat both drug misuse and coexisting mental health conditions. It supports the treatment of amphetamine type substance misuse and its complications, in particular the mental health conditions that come from misusing these substances.

An increasing number of clients are presenting themselves to Mirikai with amphetamine type stimulants as a primary or secondary drug of concern. In 2008-09, statistics showed that 31 per cent of residential clients identified amphetamines as a primary drug of concern and another 25 per cent identified amphetamines as a secondary drug of concern. Statistics from the new Complex Needs Assessment Panel, which is housed at Banjara, indicate that more than 50 per cent of its client group with complex needs indicate amphetamines as a primary drug of choice. Many clients presenting have other medical or health issues as a result of drug use, and it became clear to the Gold Coast Drug Council that treatment and counselling support were dependent on having available a GP to address the medical concerns and make the necessary referrals to specialists. The Banjara Medical Centre now makes that possible.

As mentioned previously, Mirikai has an excellent reputation, which is something I have witnessed repeatedly as the local federal member over many years. But Mirikai’s reach extends beyond the electorate of McPherson and, indeed, beyond Gold Coast City itself. It was recently announced that the Gold Coast Drug Council has been chosen to deliver a new drug and alcohol rehabilitation service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Cairns and its surrounds. When announcing the Cairns funding, the Australian government recognised the efforts of the Gold Coast Drug Council and said:

… it demonstrated the strongest capacity for best practice drug and alcohol rehabilitation service delivery and good financial management through an open tender process.

The Gold Coast Drug Council’s programs and services are emulated by other rehabilitation services. It has also been recognised by the Institute for Healthy Communities Australia, one of the very few non-government organisations to receive such accreditation in Australia.

There is no doubt that Mirikai is a success story, but the reason for its success is its people: the staff, the volunteers and those requiring rehabilitation. The CEO of Mirikai is Mary Alcorn. Mary is highly regarded in the Gold Coast community. She has been with Mirikai for 23 years and has played a huge role in making it the cutting edge organisation it is. That is what makes Mirikai special—the dedication and professionalism of its staff and all its volunteers, the innovativeness of its programs and its emphasis on lending a helping hand to those in need.
The going is tougher for people with addictions and mental illness, but with the right treatment there is nothing stopping them from leading full and enriched lives. Over the years, I have met numerous graduates of Mirikai and attended their graduation ceremonies. These are young people who have had addictions and have suffered from mental illness. Many of them are exceptionally talented. I have shed a tear or two with their families as they have gone through these programs, come out the other end and become productive members of our society, particularly as part of our community on the Gold Coast. They are very brave young people, they are very talented and they have something to give back once they have gone through those rehabilitation programs.

I applaud Mary and all her team for their passion, their commitment and their dedication to the programs that they are delivering on the Gold Coast. I am proud to have been associated with them and to have assisted them over the years I have been the federal member for McPherson.

Road Safety

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (4.35 pm)—I rise today to speak about an issue that I think all members of the House are concerned about, which is the number of fatalities and injuries that occur on our roads right around Australia. Of particular concern to me are the fatalities and serious injuries that occur in South Australia and in my electorate of Kingston.

Last calendar year in South Australia there were 119 fatalities and over a thousand serious injuries. This year alone—and we are only two months into the year—there have been close to 20 fatalities on South Australia’s roads. We are seeing people involved in crashes that result in death, cutting short their lives. We are seeing deaths and injuries that could be avoided.

There are a lot of things that contribute to fatalities and serious injuries on our roads. These include vehicle speed, drink-driving, inattention, complacency and fatigue. Improving safety on our roads is not just the role of road users—although their role is significant—and not just the role of governments. There needs to be a whole-of-community approach to reducing fatalities and injuries.

I have spoken to a number of people in my electorate who have survived a road crash but have had significant injury. It can be debilitating for a person’s entire life. Their stories have moved me significantly, and I believe this is a serious issue that we need to give some attention to.

That is why I was very pleased that the Prime Minister visited my electorate a couple of weekends ago to announce a joint federal and state government commitment of $18 million to construct a bypass at the intersection of McLaren Vale and Victor Harbor Road. This is a dangerous intersection that has seen close to 35 crashes in the last few years and we have seen a fatality at that intersection. McLaren Vale is growing in popularity for tourists and approximately 18,000 cars use that intersection corridor to the city on a daily basis.

This is a very important commitment. It is an example of the state and federal government working together to look at where the problems are—this was previously a T-junction—and how we might go about addressing them. The contribution from the federal government is $14.4 million and the contribution from the South Australian government is $3.6 million. Also, improving this intersection will support 120 local jobs. This has been one of the very important initiatives in my electorate and hopefully the federal government can contribute in improving the safety of our roads.
As I started off saying, road accidents are a concern of mine, and I think everyone in this House should be concerned that close to 181 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 were seriously injured on our roads last year. Young drivers only make up 11 per cent of the total population but they account for 34 per cent of all road fatalities and 25 per cent of serious injuries. They are over-represented in this area and we all need to take this issue very seriously. We need to work with young people to continue to improve our roads and to make sure that we do something to drive down the number of fatalities and serious injuries on our roads around the country, specifically in my electorate of Kingston in South Australia.

**Gambling**

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (4.39 pm)—I rise tonight to raise a concern that many Australians share about the prevalence of gambling. I would particularly like to draw attention to the Productivity Commission’s report about gambling in Australia—a number of its recommendations—and the incredible hypocrisy of some federal Labor members to call upon state governments to take action. There is no question that there is a need for state and territory governments to be active and engaged on this topic, but what is not so well-appreciated in this parliament is that the federal Labor government could take action if it chose to.

The Rudd Labor government has chosen not to lift a finger on one of the fastest growing and most troubling areas of gambling—interactive online gambling. It falls right within the jurisdiction of the federal parliament. There is legislation already available where action could be authorised. Instead, while the Prime Minister runs around claiming there is a war on gambling, he will not lift a finger to take any action whatsoever about a pervasive and insidious form of gambling taking hold of communities and households around our country—over which he has a full opportunity to influence.

He will not take that responsibility. It is completely within the Commonwealth’s jurisdiction. I call on the Rudd Labor government tonight to stop talking about a war on gambling and to call off the federal Labor members of parliament who think that their job is to go around jaw-boning and gobbing off at state and territory governments to do all they should, and actually turn their minds to where they are responsible—and that is the area of interactive gambling.

There was some work done in this chamber, back in 2008 when I introduced a private member’s bill, that drew attention to this opportunity, in which international analysis of gambling investment opportunities pointed squarely to interactive online gambling. We have the growth of this activity in our country. It is an activity that is bringing many students in United States universities to their knees: where they can all get around some technology, have all the sounds, sights and stimuli of race day, and gamble to their heart’s content. They can consume alcohol. They can do this in their own homes. They can lose their own home without leaving it and lose their shirt without even having to put one on.

This is the reality of gambling. It is a growth area that we should tackle now. Instead of going around putting out big statements about what everyone else should be doing, the Rudd Labor government should do what it is able to do, what it is responsible for and what is right within its jurisdiction. There are technologies around that could possibly open the way for conditional approval of this activity but with some of the safeguards that are so regularly talked about in poker venues.
These poker machine venues—and I must declare a picayune interest—bore me witless; but for those people who get pleasure out of them they are a part of the social fabric of many communities. But they are incredibly supervised. They are in venues where there are dress codes. They are in locations where your activity is observed. They have got restrictions on alcohol consumption. There are even now further measures on how you can update your access to cash, the size of the bets you can place, the amounts you can lose and the constraints you can impose on your own behaviour in a venue that is public with all of those accountabilities and checks and balances.

Yet debate in this parliament from Labor members focuses more on that heavily regulated, highly observed and highly supervised form of gambling. But it blissfully and conveniently ignores this insidious form of gambling that is in your home, away from any observation, away from any constraints on how your update through EFTPOS the funds that you are gambling, no limit on the technology use in terms of the value of the wagering, the cost of your betting session, the frequency with which it is updated, no caution or concern about losses that might be recorded and no-one there checking to make sure you are not incredibly inebriated while you pour enormous amounts of money into this technology.

Why is this such a blind spot? Why won’t the federal Labor government and Prime Minister Rudd, if he has got a skerrick of genuine concern and a slither of authentic belief that gambling is a problem, lift a finger? Why will he not lift a finger to tackle an area of gambling that is one of the fastest growth areas over which the Commonwealth has complete jurisdiction? Conveniently, and I think incredibly disappointingly, the Rudd Labor government just turns its back completely on this area.

I urge people to turn their minds to this opportunity. I invite the government to pick up my private member’s bill from 2008. I encourage the Labor members opposite to stop telling everyone else what they should be doing, to look to themselves and their responsibilities as federal legislators and to urge the Prime Minister to take action. He talks a great game about this but does absolutely nothing in an area that is completely within his court. If he is serious the Prime Minister should tackle and seek to regulate interactive gambling with all the checks and safeguards that are imposed on other forms of gambling. (Time expired)

Leukaemia Foundation

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.45 pm)—I rise to speak this evening about the Leukaemia Foundation, which has a vision to cure, a mission to care. Leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma are blood cancers. In 2009, it was projected that 9,792 Australians would be diagnosed with one of these three diseases, the equivalent of one every hour. Of these, half were expected to be diagnosed with lymphoma, a third with leukaemia and a fifth with myeloma. It is estimated that someone loses their life every two hours from one of these insidious diseases. Leukaemia is the most common form of childhood cancer. People with acute leukaemia are typically required to begin treatment within 24 hours of diagnosis.

This weekend the Leukaemia Foundation will be undertaking the World’s Greatest Shave. Like some in this place, I am follicly challenged, but this weekend in the Riverlink Shopping Centre, the biggest shopping centre in the federal electorate of Blair, the Ipswich Mayor, Paul Pisasale, will be undertaking the task of being a hairdresser. In other words, he will get the clippers out and shave my head. I am expected to join about 125,000 Australians in doing that this week-
end. Last year my 18-year-old daughter was in fact the pin-up girl for Shave for a Cure in Queensland. Thank goodness she is good-looking like her mother and does not look like me! The Leukaemia Foundation is expecting to raise $13.5 million across the weekend of 11 to 13 March. They have got about 35 per cent of that so far. I want to commend the Leukaemia Foundation, particularly in Queensland, for the work they do.

I would urge all individuals, businesses, organisations, families and friends across my electorate to get involved in this project. People have pledged to shave or colour their hair any time from 11 to 13 March. The World’s Greatest Shave is one of Australia’s biggest fundraising events. People of all ages can get involved. There will be hundreds of people at Riverlink this Saturday. Paul Pisasale is a good friend of mine, but I urge him to do the right thing by me and many others. I am sure Paul will undertake the task with diligence, capability and enthusiasm.

I want to commend Peter Johnstone, the CEO of the Leukaemia Foundation in Queensland, for the great work he does. He is a very hardworking individual, a very capable man. I also commend his offsider, Wayne Gaddes, who is a jack-of-all-trades and coordinates many events across Queensland.

Leukaemia is an insidious disease. My daughter Jacqui decided to do this last year on her 18th birthday because her great uncle suffered terribly from leukaemia and she saw what it did to him. Leukaemia affects many people. It affects children, and as anyone who has seen a child suffering from leukaemia, the tragedy of it and the implications and consequences of it for their family would know, it breaks your heart. It breaks your heart whether they are a young Australian or an older Australian, because no-one should suffer from this disease. We just do not know what causes it and we need to undertake research. We need to spend more money and we need to be aggressive in our campaign to rid our country of this scourge. This is an awful disease that respects no-one. It attacks the rich and the poor, Catholics and Protestants, gays and straight people, and people in rural and regional areas and people in the cities.

Many of us in this House have had our loved ones or friends affected by leukaemia. I would urge all people in my electorate to get behind the Leukaemia Foundation, to get behind the World’s Greatest Shave and to contribute, donate and participate. Let us rid our country of this insidious disease and its associated diseases.

Coptic Christians

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (4.49 pm)—Recently I had the pleasure to meet with the Coptic Orthodox Bishop of Melbourne, Bishop Suriel. There are 70,000 Coptic Christians living in Australia today and the history of the Christian Copts in Egypt is one of a fragile co-existence punctuated by periods of persecution and violence. There are around eight million Coptic Christians living in Egypt and they do face persecution as a religious minority. The most recent massacre of Coptic Christians occurred on 6 January 2010, when six Christians and one off-duty police officer were gunned down and killed as they left church following a celebration of Christmas mass in the city of Nagaa Hammadi in Upper Egypt.

During the funeral of those murdered, government security forces used tear gas to silence protesters that had gathered. This deadly attack follows years of communal violence and clashes between Copts and Muslims where churches have been firebombed, Christian shops torched and systematic discrimination and human rights
abuses have been documented by credible human rights associations including Amnesty International. Amnesty condemned the attacks and has called on the Egyptian authorities to initiate a credible investigation and to take greater measures to protect religious minorities in Egypt.

Egypt is obliged under international law to ensure the protection of racial and religious groups and individuals. According to the US state department’s religious freedom report, however, the Copts’ ability to exercise their basic right to free worship is frustrated by Egypt’s complex and frequently arbitrary requirements for building and repairing churches. Religiously discriminatory laws and practices apply to Copts concerning conversion, marriage, parenthood, education and clergy salaries. The reported abduction and rape of young Copt girls is particularly upsetting. I refer to a story in the *Washington Times* which details an incident which occurred last October. The article states:

… Samria Markos, a single mother living in Alexandria, said her 17-year-old daughter, Amira, disappeared while on her way to work at a plastics factory. She got a call from “Sheikh Mohammed” who told her Amira was converting to Islam. When she showed up at a local mosque to look for her daughter, she was told to keep silent or her 9-year-old son would be killed. The woman and her son fled the area. Amira has not been heard from since.

The government of Egypt has also effectively restricted Christians from senior government, political, military and educational positions and there is increasing discrimination in the private sector also. Copts are increasingly marginalised in the political system. There are currently only six Christian members of the assembly—none of whom are directly elected but are appointed by the president, to whom they are politically beholden.

Whilst the Australian media and several world leaders have condemned the most recent attacks, the Australian government has not done so. Members of the US congress wrote to President Mubarak after the incident, urging Egypt to better protect the Coptic Christian community. The European parliament passed a resolution seeking for the Egyptian government to:

… guarantee that Coptic Christians and members of other religious communities and minorities enjoy the full range of human rights and fundamental freedoms …

The Italian foreign minister has stated that:

The violence perpetrated against the Coptic Christian community in Egypt is a cause for horror and censure.

The Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs has also strongly condemned the attacks and called upon the Egyptian government to:

… continue its efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice and restore calm and order to the area. We call on the broader Egyptian community to work together to end sectarian violence.

In government, the coalition worked to resettle in Australia around 100 Coptic Christians each year who were persecuted for expressing their religious beliefs in Egypt. It is our understanding from what has been reported to us by the Copts in Australia that this arrangement no longer exists under this government. These people were resettled in Australia under our humanitarian program and it is disappointing to see that the Rudd Labor government is no longer providing assistance to these people, particularly working in concert with the Coptic Orthodox Church here in Australia.

The coalition is concerned that the Egyptian government’s failure to protect its minority groups will lead to an escalation in sectarian violence, and we call upon the authorities to ensure that security forces provide Coptic Christians with appropriate pro-
tection. We also call upon the Australian government to end their silence and join the calls of the international community in expressing our concern as Australians over the recent violence and continued repression of religious freedom in Egypt and to reopen access to our humanitarian visa program to Coptic Christians.

**Paid Parental Leave**

Ms REA (Bonner) (4.54 pm)—I rise tonight to address the debate that is currently occurring around the very important issue of paid parental leave. I do so because under ordinary circumstances, as someone who has been a working mother since I was in my early 20s and as someone who has been all my life a champion and campaigner for the rights of women and the rights of working people, to have the privilege to stand in this parliament and be part of a debate around the issue of implementing paid parental leave would be something I would welcome and be proud of. But I am a little bit concerned about the debate that is occurring at the moment because we have before us two very clearly different policies around implementing paid parental leave and I am concerned that the debate is not about implementing paid parental leave but is in fact about building up reasons to block it. I will outline that a little later.

We have two policies before us. One comes from the Rudd Labor government. There was a very clear election commitment by the Australian Labor Party that when a Labor government was elected it would move towards implementing a policy around paid parental leave. It is a policy that has been rigorously scrutinised and is the result of much consultation and discussion and its recommendations come out of a year-long inquiry that was conducted by the Productivity Commission. Therefore, it is a policy that is fiscally responsible, affordable and already budgeted for by the government. It is clearly one that provides equal access for all working women in this country to what is a reasonable weekly salary or wage to assist them and their families when they are at home taking time off work to look after a newborn child—a weekly equivalent of the minimum wage at around $544 per week. This builds on the tradition of the Labor Party and Labor governments, which have always been the champions of working families and the rights of working people in this country. Job security, income security, conditions of work and conditions that support working people to enjoy a lifestyle that enables them to bring up their families in a comfortable economic environment are things that we have championed over the last hundred years.

On the other hand, you have the opposition presenting what has been eloquently described as a thought bubble policy that is financially irresponsible. It imposes a great big tax on everything by asking big business to pay—and it is a significant amount. Indeed, the Treasurer is saying it is around $10.8 billion. We know it will be passed on to consumers. It will become a tax on everything, not just for those who can afford to pay but for those who are least in a position to pay. This is because it will be passed on through consumption rather than being a responsible policy funded by the government.

It is also inherently unfair. It does not provide equal access to maternity leave. It says, ‘Your worthiness as a stay-at-home mother for six months is dependent on the salary that you are earning.’ It does not treat and acknowledge the need for women to be able to stay home or cover their costs and supplement their income as does the government’s policy. It says, ‘If you earn $150,000 then that is what you will get and if you earn $30,000 then that is what you will get.’ It does not acknowledge the inherent inequality in that policy. It says that those who are the
most vulnerable in this community will pay for that inequitable policy through an increase in the goods and services that they procure, because we know that big business will pass on that cost to those people they are providing goods for.

I believe that this debate is not about which is the best policy on paid parental leave; it is about the opposition leader reinforcing his position that he would see paid parental leave over his dead body. He is going to argue that he will block this in the Senate. He will ignore the campaigns of the last 30 and more years of women in this country to get fair and equitable paid parental leave. He wants to block it and say he is blocking it because his policy, although irresponsible, is better. *(Time expired)*

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 5.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Sullivan to move:
That the House:
(1) recognises the importance of the Australian Defence Force Reserves (ADFR) to Australia’s overall defence capability;
(2) acknowledges that ADFR service requires significant sacrifices to be made on the part of Reservists, their families and their civilian employers;
(3) values the contributions made by ADFR personnel during deployments with Army, Air Force and Navy colleagues; and
(4) expresses appreciation to the Army Reserve personnel deployed in the Solomon Islands under Operation ANODE as part of Australia’s contribution to the Pacific Island Forum’s Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands.

Ms Parke to move:
That the House:
(1) recognises that 24 March is World Tuberculosis Day and notes that 9.4 million people developed tuberculosis in 2008 and that nearly 2 million people die each year from this preventable and curable disease;
(2) notes that 50 per cent of new tuberculosis cases occur in the South East Asia and Western Pacific regions, and that these regions also contain half of the 22 high-burden countries for tuberculosis;
(3) acknowledges the important work of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria which since its inception in 2002 has disbursed over $10 billion to combat these three diseases, including providing 63 per cent of all global aid resources for the fight against tuberculosis;
(4) commends the Global Fund which, through 2009, provided treatment to 6 million people who had active tuberculosis and which has been critical to the decline of prevalence and incidence of tuberculosis in many countries;
(5) notes that with continued and increased support for the Global Fund, the world will stay on track to meet the international target of halving tuberculosis prevalence by 2015; and
(6) recommends that the Australian Government consider committing further significant funds to the Global Fund at its replenishment meeting to be held later this year, for its ongoing and vital work to fight tuberculosis as well as AIDS and malaria.

Mrs Hull to move:
That the House:
(1) notes that:
(a) before the 2007 election the Labor Government promised to the Australian people that if elected, it would provide fast broadband to 98 per cent of households;
(b) ten per cent of the population has now been left out of the Labor Government’s current National Broadband Network (NBN) proposal, which equates to almost two million Australians, who largely live in the regions;
(c) towns with less than 1000 residents will not have access to the same services as those from larger towns and cities;
(d) if regional areas are consigned substan-
dard access to new and emerging tele-
communications options they will suffer
serious economic and social impacts; and

(e) small communities must be able to ac-
cess internet services which allow for
business and services to prosper; and

(2) calls on the Government to immediately out-
line details of any planning for the provision
of affordable and effective services for the 10
per cent of the population who are beyond
the NBN footprint.
Thursday, 11 March 2010

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Flinders Electorate: Crib Point Bitumen Plant

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.30 am)—I want to raise the issue of the Crib Point bitumen plant. In the last weeks we have seen the shock revelation that the Victorian Minister for Planning and Community Development had been engaged in a program of public subterfuge. A press plan was released inadvertently by his office which showed a sham process for consultation over the Windsor hotel development. It was thorough, complete and malevolent, and it took the public for contempt through the planning process. The relevance of that issue to the electorate of Flinders, and in particular the Crib Point bitumen plant, is that the decision by the minister to approve a Crib Point plant must now be rendered null and void. It should be negated; it should be rejected.

The reason is very simple. We have a pattern of misuse of position by the minister—we have clear evidence—and, in the case of the Crib Point bitumen plant, there was a public hearing and an independent panel. The independent panel recommended against the Crib Point bitumen plant and the minister, in a shabby deal, overruled the independent panel and approved the Crib Point bitumen plant. The problem with the plant is very simple: it is reindustrialising a residential town. This town did have a history of industrial development but Crib Point is now a residential town. That moment, that stage of history—has passed, and it is simply unacceptable to reindustrialise the town and to have multiple heavy truck movement right through the streets that are at the heart of this town—multiple carriages per day, multiple B-doubles—throughout the day. More than that, there will be the odours and the impact of the bitumen plant. All the time we are being responsible by saying that there is ample space at North Port, in between BlueScope Steel and Esso’s gas fractionation plant.

There is an alternative five kilometres away which the community would accept, the council would accept, the state member would accept and I as the federal member would accept. So there is a clear, responsible, economic alternative. But instead we see a decision by Minister Madden which overturns the independent planning process. It smacks of the same misuse of public consultation to act as a sham. The decision must be overturned, and the minister simply cannot sustain that position. (Time expired)

Corio Electorate: Corio Bay Development

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry) (9.33 am)—Earlier in this term I spoke about a vision for a walking and cycling trail around Geelong’s Corio Bay. This trail would extend from Eastern Park through the city’s waterfront along the western and northern shores to Limeburners Bay in Corio. It is a big plan. It would open up a nine-kilometre stretch of foreshore that is presently accessible only in sections. It involves skirting around and through some of the busiest sections of Geelong’s industrial heart, including the Port of Geelong. But I believe it can and should be done. The western arm of Corio Bay boasts beautiful stretches of shoreline, and the view of Geelong from this vantage is one of its best. A cycling and walking trail will create a wonderful community asset for locals and tourists alike. It would also link to the bike path that already runs from Limeburners Bay to
Lara and establish a seamless connection between the CBD and Geelong’s north. This plan would open up and improve access to the bay for people who live in the northern suburbs, creating a safe and scenic recreational route to the bay which is currently denied. It would also be a commuter path for those who live and work nearby. For example, people in Lara who work in Geelong’s CBD could cycle to work.

Any community facility that increases options people have to pursue a healthy lifestyle is in my opinion a winner. I am delighted to say that progress has been made during the past few months on this initiative. Meetings between me, the City of Greater Geelong and various landholders have been held to canvass the possibilities and the challenges we face. The biggest issue is how we get around sensitive areas like the port, where security and safety are the primary concern. There are legitimate concerns about intermingling of pedestrians and cyclists in areas of heavy industry. Commercial operations cannot be compromised and safety for all must be paramount. This will require innovative engineering solutions in some sections. Pedestrian bridges, tunnels, flyovers and boardwalks are issues that need further consultation with all stakeholders involved, especially industry.

Once we have a clear idea of the solutions available and what solutions stakeholders would accept, we will be in a position to develop a concept plan that can be costed and that will guide the best route available. There are clearly issues that need to be worked through, but what has been great to see is the positive response to the concept of a cycling and walking path around Corio Bay. The City of Greater Geelong have been very helpful in taking this initiative forward and I thank them. Industry has been prepared to attend meetings, look at the options and discuss the issues, which I really appreciate. This is a long-term plan but it is a plan that in my view has enormous merit. Our north-facing bay is a world-class asset, but in some stretches it is also a hidden treasure. My aim is to see this hidden treasure, which is after all the very reason Geelong was established as a settlement in the first place, opened up so that Corio Bay can be enjoyed by all.

McMillan Electorate: Hazelwood Power Station

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.36 am)—Deputy Speaker, today I rise to draw to your attention and that of this parliament to the vile campaign by Environment Victoria to close down Hazelwood Power Station. Of course I stand in protection of my own working families, those that work at Hazelwood Power Station, those that are surrounded by Hazelwood Power Station and those that hang off all 500 of the people that work at Hazelwood Power Station. Environment Victoria has one simple aim, to close down Hazelwood Power Station, and they are running this campaign to do such a thing.

My mind is not closed, and never will be, to our need to address climate change and to clean up our power stations. I have been the member for McMillan in the past and I am its member today. I do not actually have the power stations in my electorate anymore, but I have the people that work in those power stations in my electorate at Moe. Because I care for those people, I like to keep an open mind about where we can head with the marvellous resource that is Victorian brown coal. I am reminded of the local government council candidate who says, ‘I will give you cheaper rates if you elect me.’ When elected, that local government councillor finds out that the potholes on the road, at the front gate of the farmer that elected him or her in the first place, have to be serviced by someone.
We as politicians and leaders in our community have to govern for the day, in the day. We cannot govern for what may be into the future. There are great opportunities in Latrobe Valley, particularly with changes to how we generate the power. To close down Hazelwood Power Station would cut off 20 per cent of Victoria’s power supply, which no government would ever allow anyway, because we have a growing community with greater needs and because we have greater opportunities for manufacturing. That has been the basis of our wealth for many years and will continue to be so in perpetuity. We have already cleaned up our act in Latrobe Valley, and we have to be open to how we can do better and where we will be in the future in regard to gasification of coal and how that can be introduced in existing plants or new plants that will be built.

There are great opportunities running into the future. I have said before in this House that we are locked into coal for the next 50 years. That does not mean there will not be opportunities for renewables, that there will not be opportunities for abatement or that there will not be opportunities in how we go about using that marvellous resource of brown coal into the next 10 or 20 years. That is why I stand today and say it is wrong to send money to Environment Victoria to help them run this campaign, which has the simplistic view that just closing down a power station will change the world forever. We need as a community to address the issues but to address them in such a way that we have a long-term viable future for our families and our future in the Latrobe Valley.

Indonesia

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (9.39 am)—’It is impossible to imagine a more pro-Australian Indonesian President’ than Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Sadly, he will be appreciated more after his departure from office. Yudhoyono brings the torch of friendship to an Australia still deeply equivocal about the equation of democracy, Islam and nationalism that constitutes our great neighbour.

That was the judgment of Paul Kelly, one of Australia’s pre-eminent political commentators. There is no regional relationship more important to Australia than our relationship with Indonesia. As President Yudhoyono said, it is not just an economic relationship; it is a strategic relationship that is central to Australia’s security.

Cooperation between the two peoples in effectively stamping out the Islamist networks that carried out the Bali bombings has been one of the more positive developments in our region in recent times. Dulmatin, one of the surviving architects of the Bali mass murder, was among the three terrorists killed in Jakarta yesterday. It is a remarkable thing that Indonesia has managed simultaneously to become a successful democracy and to crack down very strongly on these terrorist cells.

President Yudhoyono pointed out that the relationship between Australia and Indonesia is becoming a people-to-people relationship. I must say that during the lunch I thought the avuncular remarks of the Leader of the Opposition about travel warnings and Australian tourists going to Bali were fair enough. I personally am going back to Indonesia for, I think, the sixth time in April.

But I am sorry to have to draw attention to one jarring note in yesterday’s proceedings. That was the speech made in the parliament by the Leader of the Opposition. In only 300 words, he managed to work in two partisan jibes directed at the Prime Minister: one on the
subject of people-smuggling and the other on the Prime Minister’s proposal for a new re-
gional forum. The Leader of the Opposition needs to learn that there are times and places
when partisan politics are not appropriate, and one of them is when making speeches in front
of visiting heads of state. To make partisan jibes in such a speech is inappropriate, undignified
and harmful to Australia’s national interests. It is something that John Howard, for example,
would never have done.

No doubt our guests will draw their own conclusions about the man who puts himself for-
ward as Australia’s alternative Prime Minister—although, of course, they are too polite to
make any references to his inappropriate remarks. I, however, am not obliged to be so diplo-
matic. The Leader of the Opposition confirmed the view held by most observers of his behav-
iour since becoming leader last year that he does not think before he speaks, he always man-
gages to offend someone whatever he says and he never knows when to stop. These are not the
qualities Australia wants in a Prime Minister.

Mrs Gash—Are you worried about him?

Mr DANBY—I am not worried about him as the interjector said. I am trying to make
judgements about foreign affairs and appropriate remarks in front of the Indonesian President.
Most people know that I do not try to make partisan political points about Australia in interna-
tional affairs, and I do think this was a really undignified and stupid partisan display in front
of the Indonesian President.

Mitchell Electorate: Mrs Peggy Womersley

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (9.42 am)—I rise this morning to acknowledge the passing of a
former Baulkham Hills Shire mayor and councillor and long-time resident of the Hills district,
Peggy Womersley, on 16 January after a long and protracted struggle with illness. Peggy was
an outstanding contributor to the growth and development of our district not only through her
stint on council and as mayor but also within our local small business community in the Hills.

A pharmacist by profession, Peggy opened a store at the Kingsdene shops on Felton Road,
Carlingford, before expanding into much larger premises at Westfield North Rocks. When I
was growing up in Carlingford as a youngsters, my family and I were frequent visitors to
Peggy’s chemist shop, and I can distinctly remember the personal level of care and attention
that she delivered to our community. She was a very successful small business woman be-
cause of her ability with people. She will be greatly missed throughout the communities of
North Rocks and Carlingford, where she served the community with distinction for so many
years, and her successful small business enterprises, pharmacies, continue to flourish in those
communities.

Peggy, together with her husband, Noel, and children, Jan, Roger and Sue, first moved into
Carlingford in 1967 before moving to North Rocks in 1986. She was elected to represent the
residents of East Ward and the former D Riding for three terms, from 1987 to 1999. During
this time, Peggy held the office of shire president and mayor for three years, in 1991-92,
1992-93 and 1993-94. She later went on to serve as the shire’s deputy mayor for a further

In December last year, the Baulkham Hills Shire Council moved to thank and acknowledge
Peggy’s fine contribution to our community by naming a local reserve in her honour. I am
very happy to say that the local oval near where I grew up, a few hundred metres down the
road from my family home, Carlingford’s Kingsdene Oval, is now known as the Peggy Womersley Reserve. This reserve is located just a stone’s throw from her former pharmacy and, indeed, is an appropriate and much welcomed development in our community.

Peggy was a much loved community advocate who was always held in high esteem by the residents of Carlingford and North Rocks. She was at one time a state political candidate after the demise of Tony Packard and, in a field of 25 candidates, she missed out by a single vote. Our state, New South Wales, was the poorer for the lack of her experience in small business and her ability with people. It was a great privilege to attend the thanksgiving service held in honour of her diverse and varied life on 22 January. At the service donations were made to the Peggy Womersley Westmead Medical Research Foundation, raising significant funds for research.

Today I want to record that Peggy was a great woman and an outstanding contributor to the Hills community. She will be sadly missed by her family and those who had the honour of working with her, but her legacy will continue, her small businesses will continue to flourish and her family are making a great contribution to the Hills community.

**Epilepsy**

Ms HALL (Shortland) (9.45 am)—Today I wish to table a report completed by the Parliamentary Friends of Epilepsy following an informal inquiry into the impact of epilepsy in Australia. On 30 October 2009 we held an informal inquiry in Canberra, and at that inquiry we took evidence from a wide range of epilepsy support groups, doctors and people that have epilepsy. We had a roundtable discussion in the afternoon, and that was a fantastic experience. I think all the members of parliament that attended learned firsthand what impact epilepsy has on the lives of those people who either have epilepsy or are carers of people with epilepsy.

I would like to acknowledge the fine work of my staff member Mark Raper, who put a lot of effort into putting together the submissions and helping with the organisation, and Pat Davies from Gary Humphries’s office, who also put in a lot of work. Today in the chamber we have Jacinta Cummins from JECA, who was also a great asset to those of us that were involved in the hearings. We had more than 360 submissions and I have received quite a few since the day of the hearing; I think the total number is closer to 400 than 360.

The committee made some very good recommendations. These recommendations will be given to the Minister for Health and Ageing and to the Parliamentary Secretary for Health. The recommendations range from the need for comprehensive education and awareness to educating government departments, the need for positive employment initiatives and looking at issues surrounding travel. One that I support quite strongly is a national health survey to provide accurate information on the data concerning the incidence and treatment of epilepsy. There are also recommendations on greater research, better training for doctors and support for carers. We touched on transport issues and a greater effort to demystify what epilepsy is and how it should be treated.

I recommend the report to the House and I thank everybody that was involved, including my parliamentary colleagues Senator Humphries, Damian Hale and Mark Coulton. I seek leave to table the report. (Time expired)

Leave granted.
Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (9.48 am)—I wish to raise the concern of a constituent of mine in relation to current Centrelink office operating procedures. He and his elderly father-in-law were trying to use the services at Centrelink in Fremantle. He became frustrated with the procedures they faced and contacted my office. The gentleman was very concerned that, especially, elderly people have to stand and wait for a long time in queues just to get a ticket to sit down and wait some more. This is not the first such complaint that I have received. My office has received calls from people actually in the queue at Centrelink venting and voicing their sheer frustration at the length of time they have spent in the queue. It is also worth noting that some people are required to visit Centrelink offices more regularly than others or need to return to provide further documentation only to be faced with long queues and long waits.

The constituent I mentioned said the system in Medicare was much better in that you got a ticket immediately and then were able to sit and wait instead of standing for long periods at a time. I wrote to the Minister for Human Services expressing my constituent’s concerns and outlining the reasons behind his complaint. The minister replied, saying that ticketing machines were used in the past but were discontinued because the preference of customers was ‘to be addressed by name rather than a number’. The minister continued, stating that there were various procedures in place to assist managing queues. My constituent and his father remain unconvinced. They told me that this sort of reasoning for such a necessary treatment of our most needy citizens is wrong and should not be tolerated. Also, if these reasons are valid, why does it not apply to a similar situation in Medicare offices? People do not seem in the least offended by having a number called out there. Many government departments and businesses use ticketing systems with provision for people to sit down and wait. This method is especially important and beneficial for those Centrelink customers who are elderly, disabled, unwell or who have small children with them.

Despite the advances in technology mentioned by the minister, I would urge him to rethink the use of ticketing machines in Centrelink offices and consider the benefit that many Australians would receive by streamlining this Centrelink procedure.

Lowe Electorate: Visually Impaired Electors

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (9.51 am)—This morning I welcome the recent initiatives by the Special Minister of State, Senator the Honourable Joe Ludwig, concerning blind and visually impaired electors. I am very pleased that our government yesterday introduced the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010 providing blind and visually impaired electors the legal option of casting a secret vote. These amendments will ensure that arrangements can be put in place before the next election while longer term solutions are prepared. Importantly, it is part of our government’s response to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified in 2008. Under article 29, the convention states:

... Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others ...

In 2004, I first raised my concerns in this place that visually impaired electors did not have the right to cast a vote in secret, and I called on the government and the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to investigate this matter and provide the necessary technology and a system that would realise this goal. In 2007, a trial of electronic voting was conducted...
but in 2009 the electoral matters committee deputy chairman noted that the electronic trial did not increase participation levels enough to make the cost worth while. A secret ballot is a democratic right in Australia and I am pleased that the Special Minister of State has ensured that the Rudd government will provide a means to uphold this principle for our visually impaired citizens and that we continue to work to fulfil our obligation under the United Nations convention.

In my electorate of Lowe, I am proud to host two wonderful organisations that provide invaluable support and resources for the visually impaired. The head office of Vision Australia is located in Enfield and the Association of Blind Citizens of New South Wales is located in Burwood. I know that their members deserve our attention in this place to ensure that we continue to work towards voting equality. I know that our government and in particular the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, the Hon. Bill Shorten, have been working tirelessly on the National Disability Strategy, which aims to improve the lives of people with a disability. I commend both the Special Minister of State and the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services for their efforts and I look forward to further improvements for the benefit of Australians with a disability, as well as their families and carers.

Gilmore Electorate: Bella Gilbertson

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (9.54 am)—Bella Gilbertson is a young lady who lives in Gerringong and delivered what I considered to be a very impressive speech to the Gerringong Lions Club. She attends Kiama High School, and I would like to share her words with you:

I want to live in a peaceful world. I want to hear about our leaders agreeing, on the news. I want to see something being done about global warming, rather than just being a topic which will just get talked about and occasionally act as a form of leverage or accusation.

Barack Obama, President of the United States, once stated that change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for; we are the change that we seek.

The world has recently adopted this position of being in the process of alteration. Whether this is just a facade or for real is yet to be revealed.

Personally, being an optimist, I believe that the next few years will unleash a somewhat dramatic difference to what the world has been subject to throughout the past decade. Maybe I’ll be proven wrong. Maybe all the promises that we’ve been fed throughout those in power are meaningless words, a broken vow just to get to a high place of authority.

Yet, why do we need our world leaders, prime ministers and presidents alike, to create the pathway which we will obediently follow? Why don’t we create our own pathways, off the track, leading to where we believe the right decision lies.

As a seventeen year old, lucky enough to be a school captain I’ve met many strong and promising peers, and through these experiences I really do believe the key to the door of change rests within the children of today, the leaders of tomorrow. We, as the youth are provided with opportunities to become what we want; what we are willing to work for and where our skills and capabilities lie. Is this an opportunity wasted?

Here I am thinking that I really don’t really take much time to appreciate that I’m provided with: an opportunity to make a difference. I’m able to question my place and what society asks of me. Able to present my views on what’s right and wrong and hope people listen. And I’m able to dream of that peaceful society.

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It is a rarity for us to stop and think we are actually provided with an opportunity to create change. We can consider problems like greenhouse gas emissions, a form of polite conversation; something where we can meet most people halfway in. But world issues will only ever be talking points unless we do something to abolish them. Not in front of the cameras, not to gain points in a political hierarchy but genuinely to make the world a better place.

So why aren’t we actually doing something about it? Rather than just waiting on someone else to do the work? Even now I can talk about the combustion of fossil fuels or why I believe regardless of whether it’s an actual issue or a false theory, we should still treat the environment with respect.

I can fool myself into saying that I am creating change. By raising awareness I’m causing others to think and talk, which will lead to these people being ‘aware’.

They will then let others know, who will then tell other people. Leaving us ultimately in an aware world … where we can talk about things?

Speaking is all well and good. But let’s make the next move. For a journey of a thousand miles really does begin with that single step.

An example of this journey whether it actually be a thousand miles or lets say one and a half kilometres can be taken from Glenn Cunningham. The 12 year old boy that was told by doctors that he would never walk again due to being the unlucky recipient of major burns.

Twenty years later, this boy grown into a man runs the 1500 metre in the Olympics, and wins silver. Not the special Olympics, the actual Olympics. So whether we are working to change ourselves, the environment or the world. There is nothing stopping us from taking that one step

So I will.

(Time expired)

**Holt Electorate: Christians Helping in Primary Schools**

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (9.57 am)—I would like to take the time today to pay tribute to an organisation in Melbourne’s south-east that I have worked with in the past and whose director I had the opportunity to meet with again last month. Christians Helping in Primary Schools, or CHIPS for short, is but one of the iconic non-profit organisations in our region working tirelessly for young kids who have had a tough time.

CHIPS has been operating for over 10 years now, which is testament to the work of Eric Wieckmann, often known as ‘Captain Eric’. Eric was awarded the Ministry to Children children’s worker of the year in 2000 and won Citizen of the Year for the City of Casey in 2005. Eric has been working with kids for over 20 years and each year works with some 10,000 children in Australia and overseas.

In my immediate region there are well over 60 schools, and CHIPS aims to help children in as many of these schools as possible. One of the most impressive things about Eric is that he is constantly trying to find new ways to help members of the community. He often speaks at school speech nights, leaders’ retreats and seminars.

As an example, CHIPS’ response to the devastation of the Black Saturday bushfires showed this organisation helps those in need. CHIPS staff and volunteers directly contributed by conducting survivors’ retreats, school seminars in Warragul and Drouin, financial assistance to Casey victims, camps for children and memorial services at Glen Crombie and Jingivick.
On an ongoing basis, CHIPS provides seminars for students, teachers and parents; counselling and welfare services; camps and programs for children in crisis; and sailing programs for disadvantaged children in places like Lysterfield Lake. It organises a Christmas show that visits numerous schools and last year performed to over 3,000 students and, of course, runs other programs in schools.

There is no shortage of kids in need who CHIPS in fact help, whether this be in the form of taking kids on a sailing camp—an opportunity that they may have never experienced before—or just providing them with some much needed love and attention.

Take the boy whose family forgot his birthday, so they threw him a party; or the girl who was suffering from depression or grief, so CHIPS waited through the pain with her till she felt some comfort; or even the young man who had his youth stolen from him, so CHIPS took him to a farm where he could let go of his inhibitions and play like any normal kid would. It is often the kids who have the toughest time in their lives who need looking out for, but the work that CHIPS does will help the ones who will help look out for each other.

Too often, the work of organisations like CHIPS goes unrecognised. Employees and volunteers like Captain Eric do not pursue a career with organisations like CHIPS because they are seeking the fame and glory for doing so. I reckon this place is a great forum for recognising the efforts of those making the community a better place to live in. Today, accordingly, I am pleased to mention the great work of Eric Wieckmann and CHIPS in this place.

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

SOCIAL SECURITY AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WEEKLY PAYMENTS) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 10 February, on motion by Ms Macklin:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (10.01 am) — I rise today to give my support to the needy and vulnerable families in my electorate of Paterson. The Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 will allow these families to access support payments twice a fortnight instead of once. It will be the responsibility of the secretary of the department to speak with the Centrelink customers to decide who needs weekly payments of social security, the family tax benefit and the baby bonus. The measures introduced through this bill will help families manage their weekly budget and will provide more timely payments for those struggling most. In particular the bill targets those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It will reduce the amount of time people have to wait for the next support payment when they have a particular need. According to figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there were 3,500 recorded homeless people in New South Wales in 2006. In the Hunter there were more than 200, with 51 in Port Stephens alone. Some charities suggest this number is actually far greater and, to make matters worse, growing higher ever year.

As reported by ABC Newcastle on 4 March 2009:

An extra 7,600 people were made homeless in New South Wales last year, when interest rates and rents were at their height, but the State Government is expecting the figures to get worse.
The latest figures released by the state’s Housing Department show around 22,500 people sought temporary accommodation in 2007-2008—an average increase of 643 people a month compared to the previous year.

These numbers are simply devastating. I cannot begin to imagine what it must be like to be forced to spend a night on the street, with nowhere to turn to have a roof put over your head and no-one to help keep your family safe and warm. This is a scary reality for far too many people, and the Rudd Labor government needs to do more to help the needy in our community. Our Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, promised to do more. In fact, in 2008 he promised to halve the homeless rate by 2020. But, as the figures I have mentioned show, homelessness so far has only increased. The Prime Minister has conceded this himself. Unless something changes—and changes soon—our number of homeless will only skyrocket further.

I say this because the cost of living, which our Prime Minister also promised to fix, has spiralled out of control. If families cannot afford to eat, cannot afford to drive and cannot afford child care while they go off to work then chances are they will be forced onto the street. Therefore, we absolutely cannot afford this continuum of broken promises from Prime Minister Rudd. Let us consider the rising cost of living in Australia with a look at grocery prices. The Rudd Labor government promised to put downward pressure on food costs but, after wasting more than $7 million on failed GROCERYchoice websites, bills have increased. The *Daily Telegraph* reported on 4 February this year:

GROCERY prices have soared with the cost of a standard basket of goods rising by about $10 in three months.

Figures released yesterday show families were slugged far more for meat, fruit and vegetables, beer and various other grocery items in the three months to Christmas, compared with the three months to September.

Prime Minister Rudd’s living costs broken promise No. 1: groceries.

Now let us move on to power. First Paterson families copped a 20 per cent rise in electricity bills in July 2009. Then the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal released its draft price report on 15 December. This report states that power bills will rise by up to 62 per cent by 2013. That is right—in just three years we could see prices increase by around $900 a year for the average household. According to IPART almost half of this price rise is to pay for the Rudd Labor government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, Prime Minister Rudd’s tax on everything, which will do absolutely nothing for the environment. It makes a mockery of his promise to make things cheaper. Prime Minister Rudd’s living costs broken promise No. 2: electricity.

I will move on to fuel costs. In 2007 opposition leader Rudd said that the Howard government had:

… lost touch with working families under financial pressure, not just from interest rates, not just from rising rents, but grocery and petrol prices …

He suggested that he as Prime Minister would do something to fix this. But, after a failed and very costly Fuelwatch system, nothing has been delivered. As my constituent Jeff wrote online in January:

Today … I paid 132.9 cents for E10 at … Nelson Bay … Your ave Sydney price 120.9
I wrote to the Rudd Labor government’s minister, Dr Emerson, on behalf of Jeff last year, but to date he still has not replied. Meanwhile drivers in my electorate are still being forced to pay higher than average prices and a few petrol stations are being monitored by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. The Australian Institute of Petroleum website also shows how families in my electorate are paying higher prices for fuel. According to its figures for Forster, locals were paying 116c a litre in May last year, while now they are paying 128c per litre. That is a rise of more than 10c per litre. Meanwhile, to add further insult, Sydney figures show city drivers paid just 120c per litre on average last month. Paterson is less than two hours up the highway from Sydney, yet we pay 10c per litre more. Here we have Prime Minister Rudd’s living costs broken promise No. 3: petrol.

Finally, let us look at child care, where the Prime Minister has again been exposed as all talk and no action. A report in the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 January revealed how the Rudd Labor government changes to childcare standards will see parents slugged up to $40 extra per day or $200 a week. Seventy-nine per cent, or around four out of five, regional childcare centres have admitted that they will be forced to increase charges under the plan, yet nothing has been done to alleviate the problem. Child care is often relied upon by parents who go off to work and need a safe, trustworthy and secure place to leave their children. This service needs to be affordable for working mothers and fathers. Prime Minister Rudd’s living costs broken promise No. 4: child care.

I could go on to examples 5, 6, 7—the list is long. However, my point is already clear: Prime Minister Rudd needs to start delivering on his promise and take some real action to help families in Paterson and indeed across Australia afford basic costs. If he does not do so, more and more families in my electorate will be forced to seek help and could end up without a home. The Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 is a positive step towards helping those who are vulnerable. But we must see even more action to stop families struggling in the first place. We must have a multipronged approach to really tackle this problem and to make a change. Allow me to read an article from one of my local newspapers, the *Maitland Mercury*. On 19 February, an article by Emma Swain read:

Maitland’s Samaritans emergency relief centre is almost out of food and vouchers as an unprecedented number of residents face financial crisis.

The Samaritans’ 11 emergency relief centres have nearly exhausted all food, grocery and electricity vouchers with little sign of replenishment.

Typically February is a slower month for the Hunter-based charity giant, but this year is proving to be an exception with demand for vouchers constant since Christmas.

In December 2009, the Maitland relief centre in East Maitland, recorded its busiest month in 17 years.

‘I can’t remember a time where we have had nothing to offer those seeking assistance,’ Samaritans chief executive officer Cec Shevels said.

‘If the next six months continue with the same trends in emergency relief we will have a 40 per cent increase on last year.’

Samaritans have assisted 3011 individuals and families through emergency relief along with 4000 dependent children in the past three months.

About 30 per cent of these people had not sought Samaritans’ assistance in the past.
‘It’s the basic things that are pushing people to crisis point,’ Mr Shevels said.

‘Those on a low income are pushed to the limit and rises in bills such as electricity and water along with skyrocketing rental payments, build up over a period of time to a point when something has to give. Often it is food on the table, so we always send people away with food from the pantry or vouchers to buy food items but with our allocation exhausted, we’ve got nothing left to give those in crisis.’

What Mr Shevels explains here is that a rising number of families are under pressure because of the added living costs under this Rudd Labor government. These people, who have never struggled before and who suddenly have to rely on government assistance, may need the more flexible support payments that this bill delivers.

Mr Shevels also demonstrates the amazing work done by volunteers and groups in the Paterson community. These people, who number in their thousands, give of their time to support our region’s most vulnerable, and I cannot thank them enough for their efforts. They are often the last resort for people who have nowhere else to turn, and they do a wonderful job in helping people financially, physically and emotionally.

Another example in my electorate is the Raymond Terrace Neighbourhood Centre. This centre is headed by Colleen Whittle and runs entirely on a not-for-profit basis. It offers a drop-in centre, financial assistance, counselling, advocacy and referral, as well as crisis accommodation. The centre allows people to get help in a caring environment without discrimination and has helped many people who would otherwise have ended up on our streets. Unfortunately, because there is such demand on welfare services at the moment, support services simply cannot cope.

As noted in the article from the *Maitland Mercury*, not-for-profit groups are running out of supplies, because there is such an overwhelming demand. Today, I would ask anyone who can spare a donation, even in these tough times, to give what they can to local charities. I have seen the spirit of giving from so many of my constituents firsthand, and I know what they are capable of.

Many people are doing it tough. Many people are relying on government assistance. Many people are out on the streets, despite the Prime Minister’s promise to cut homelessness. This is simply not good enough. In real terms, across the Paterson electorate, more than 20,000 people relied on the family tax benefit last year to run their homes and support their children. It is vital that they are looked after. On top of this, more than 1,400 baby bonus payments were made in the 2007-08 financial year so that parents could provide the essentials to their babies. Weekly payments would help many of these people manage their family budgets and stop them becoming homeless.

To date, there has been little action on homelessness from the Rudd Labor government. The Prime Minister announced the boost to the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program, an initiative first announced in 2006 by then Prime Minister John Howard. However, Prime Minister Rudd has committed just $10 million to this program. Compare this to the $250 million he recently gave commercial television station operators or the $200 million that he has wasted on the inflated and disastrous insulation rebates—not to mention the $50 million about to be spent to rectify it. It appears awfully inadequate, especially for those Australians who will sleep tonight on benches, in parks and on the street.

The Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 is a bill to help struggling families and to prevent at risk people becoming homeless.
It gives more flexibility to the social security system and can help people balance their weekly budgets by reducing the time between payments. Trained professionals will decide who needs this flexibility and for how long.

However, the Rudd Labor government needs to do more to stop the rising cost of living which is forcing people out of their homes. Prime Minister Rudd promised to do so; he must deliver. I clearly remember his election commitment to apply ‘downward pressure on prices’. I also remember his promise that the buck would stop with him. Well, Prime Minister Rudd, it is time for this downward pressure to begin, because prices are only headed up and up. Finally, I would urge anyone who has the time to volunteer to help those vulnerable people in our community. More can be done to make sure everyone in our community has a place to call home, and the Rudd Labor government must make this a priority.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10.15 am)—I speak in support of the Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010. The background to this is the government’s strong commitment to reducing homelessness. Homelessness is a curse in our society. It is not a choice as the opposition leader infamously said recently; it is often the result of violence in the home, sexual abuse, alcohol and gambling addiction, personal circumstances, familial circumstances and employment circumstances. Young people who grow up in homes where they are afflicted by these problems are more likely to repeat the cycle of homelessness and trouble. That results in criminal activity and on many occasions it results in low educational attainment and achievement, lack of employment skills, lack of productivity in the workplace and a more harsh, brutal and unfair society.

One wonders what the Howard coalition government thought about homelessness in their nearly 12 years on the treasury bench. Perhaps they were going to address the issue in their 13th, 14th or 15th year of office. Certainly, when I listened to the member for Paterson, I heard nothing about the achievements of the Howard government and heard nothing about what a coalition government under the current Leader of the Opposition would do in relation to homelessness. There was much complaint, much whingeing, much carping and much aggravation but no solutions to the problems and little bipartisanship. It really is quite sad that recently in the Sydney Morning Herald the opposition leader, dealing with this issue of homelessness—and that is what this legislation before the House is about—had this to say in relation to the issue of homelessness:

But we just can’t stop people from being homeless if that’s their choice or if their situation is such that it is just impossible to look after them under certain circumstances so I would rephrase a commitment like that.

It is typical of those opposite, who think homelessness is a matter of choice. For them it is all a matter of choice. Sadly, homelessness is not the fault of so many people. Women and children find themselves in terrible situations. On any given night in this country there are about 105,000 people who are homeless—about 19 per cent in crisis accommodation, about 20 per cent in insecure accommodation, boarding houses and the like, about 45 per cent will be staying temporarily with friends or relatives, and about 16 per cent will be sleeping rough on the street.

Tragically, about 17 per cent of those people are Indigenous. Homelessness is worse amongst our Indigenous brothers and sisters. This is what the census says. This is what the facts say. And it did not all happen on 24 November 2007. It happened, so much, on the watch
of the previous government. In fact, St Vincent de Paul stated in its report, Don’t dream: it’s over, that the number of families with children which were seeking assistance from homelessness services had increased by 30 per cent over the past five years. So let’s not kid ourselves by coming into this place and claiming that it is all the fault of the Rudd Labor government.

The background to this is that we made an election commitment to do something about homelessness. In January 2008 the Prime Minister and the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, announced the development of a comprehensive long-term plan to tackle homelessness. A steering committee was appointed and in May 2008 a green paper on homelessness was released entitled Which way home? A new approach to homelessness. There was much public discussion, which was sought across all states during May and June 2008. More than 1,200 people attended 13 consultations and almost 600 written submissions were received. More than 300 people who were homeless expressed their views. As a result of that, further developments took place and the government announced a white paper called The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness. That was released in December 2008.

Part of our strategy to address the issue of homelessness is to bring forward legislation like this. I will address some of the other issues about what the government is doing. I did not intend to make a very partisan speech, but the previous speaker has goaded and prodded me into doing so. The legislation that is before the House introduces weekly payments of social security periodic payments, family tax benefit and baby bonus for a certain class of persons. People have the option, having been identified by Centrelink as potentially vulnerable people, to receive their payments in a way which will help them manage their bills better. Sadly, some people who are homeless are not well educated, do not have the skills and capacity to manage their money as they ought and need help. That is what Centrelink is there to do: give them assistance to meet their needs in terms of food, rent and essential services.

Paying the money weekly is more likely to assist people than paying money on a fortnightly, monthly or three-monthly basis. The legislation before us assists those people who lack capacity and gives them the certainty of knowing that they will have money on a weekly basis. For many of these people it is the necessities of life that they need; they have little access to money for recreation or pleasure. They just need a helping hand to get through and extract themselves from their positions of vulnerability and distress. The total amount paid to social security and family assistance customers will be the same. It is about the delivery of assistance. So the legislation is a fair piece of legislation; it gives a helping hand to those in distress.

We believe we need to help not just those who are homeless but those who are vulnerable in our society or at risk of being vulnerable. Tragically, according to the figures, more than 12,000 children last night were homeless or at risk. We cannot allow this to happen. It is a national tragedy in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Tragically, the coalition did little to address the issue during its tenure as government. As a result of the white paper the Australian government, in partnership with the states and territories, has committed $1.2 billion to address homelessness over the next four years. This is a 55 per cent increase in funding—real money on the table. It is a demonstration of the commitment of the Rudd Labor government to helping those in distress, in disadvantage and in difficulty. It will enable new

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support services to be created for people who are homeless and it is about creating new houses as well.

When it comes to social housing—which is so critical and which the previous government had an appalling record on—money is being poured into my electorate, the federal electorate of Blair. I have had many discussions over the years with housing authorities in Queensland and you only have to hear the words of the Hon. Robert Schwarten, who was a long-term minister for housing in Queensland, to realise that the previous government, the Howard government, did little in the area of public housing. In fact, it was quite amenable to ripping the heart out of public housing in this country.

In my electorate alone, under the Social Housing Initiative, we are seeing close to $32 million put into the creation of new dwellings, and about $1.2 million put into repairs to and maintenance of existing dwellings. We have also seen—to assist our defence personnel—another 111 houses being built in the Ipswich area. This is real money. Allied with our initiative to address homelessness, on 3 February 2009 we released our Nation Building and Jobs Plan—and the above is the evidence in my electorate of the money we are putting into addressing homelessness. We are putting in $6.4 billion to build 20,000 new public and community housing dwellings across the country.

There are many great communitarians in my electorate who are at the coalface of dealing with people who are vulnerable, and I want to pay tribute to them. They will be dealing with the people who will be able to avail themselves of the benefits of weekly payments. I want to pay tribute to Pastor Fred Muys from the Rivers of Life Christian Church for his ministry through Harvest Rain Christian Care. That particular church is a small church with a shopfront in Brisbane Street in Ipswich. They deliver hundreds of food parcels every week. They run literacy classes to help people from non-English-speaking backgrounds to gain literacy and greater employment skills. They have created a great enterprise there on the grounds of the old Tivoli drive-in, and created many opportunities and training facilities for our young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pastor Fred Muys and his great team of workers are to be commended. They will see the benefits in the lives of people who will be the recipients of weekly payments.

I want to pay tribute to my own church, Ipswich Baptist Church, for its 241 Ministries, located right across from the church’s old site. For a long time, that church ran community kitchens and also provided food parcels, and continues to do so. It gives counselling to people in central Ipswich who are suffering from homelessness, addiction and from other problems, of domestic and family violence. I want to pay tribute also to Ipswich Region Community Church, under the leadership of Pastor Mark Edwards, for that church’s assistance to and the partnership it has with Ipswich Baptist Church—putting on a psychologist to give psychological services and counselling to those people who attend at the 241 Ministries in Brisbane Street, Ipswich.

I want to thank Bianca Law from the Booval Community Service for the great work she does, in particular, and the community service for the great work they do, for those families in distress. I have been round with Bianca to visit families in Ipswich who have lost jobs and, as a result, are facing hardship. I have seen the despair, humiliation and not just the anger but the sadness in the eyes of men and women who have fallen into circumstances where they never
thought they would go. Bianca and her team at Booval Community Service have done great work there.

I want to thank also David Martin, who has chaired for a long time ICYS, which is a youth community service in Ipswich that has been around almost forever. The service has done great work in dealing with people who have suffered from disadvantage, particularly young families. Hannah’s House, run by the Pentecostal churches in Ipswich, particularly the Assemblies of God, deals with young women who have been forced out of their homes as a result of violence, drunkenness or other parental misbehaviour. They are all suffering challenge also. All of these great services have done great work.

They will see the benefit of this legislation. I want to pay tribute to all these local people but also thank them for what they are doing. They work closely with Centrelink, with the 90 Centrelink community engagement officers that the Rudd government employed to deal with the issues of homelessness and the risk of homelessness. Those 90 Centrelink community engagement officers help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, particularly by connecting them with mental health services, hostels, boarding houses, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and emergency accommodation. We are committed to improving the delivery services for all Australians and to making sure that the reform in this legislation will target vulnerable Australians who find it difficult to budget.

Having no money in your wallet, in your household, in your coffers at the end of a fortnight is extraordinarily difficult. Thousands and thousands of Australians find themselves in that situation every night, every week and every fortnight. I support this legislation because it will help struggling families—women in particular, children in particular—to put a roof over their heads, to put food in their bellies and to put clothes on their backs. This is good legislation. It is part of the matrix and the fabric of what the Rudd government is doing to assist the vulnerable in our community. It is a good initiative, it is a Labor initiative and I commend the legislation to the House.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (10.32 am)—The Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 enables weekly payments for certain members of a class of persons who receive a social security periodic payment, family tax benefit or the baby bonus. It is intended to target people who are assessed as being vulnerable, such as those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This measure was foreshadowed in the homelessness white paper, *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, which was released in 2008. The amendments allow the secretary of the department to identify at-risk individuals, generally by discussion with them, who may benefit from weekly rather than fortnightly payments. The class of persons from whom the individuals might be drawn will be determined by a legislative instrument to be made by the minister.

I also note that a trial of this scheme with around 1,700 disadvantaged welfare recipients was conducted in 69 Centrelink customer service centres by the then Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and Centrelink from October 2005 to April 2006—a period of time in which I was one of the responsible ministers in the department’s concerned. It has been made abundantly clear in the bill that the government has no intention of weekly payments becoming a mainstream measure, reserving it for those who are regarded as highly disadvantaged and at risk of becoming homeless. The coalition support this bill and support action that will help people who are regrettably living on the streets move into more permanent
accommodation. We believe that, in the process of taking people from homelessness to the home, we give people the tools to live and to move towards independence.

The Prime Minister’s pledge to halve homelessness by 2020 is unrealistic, especially when we have a government that is more focused on political outcomes than on real outcomes on homelessness. For example, the Prime Minister has recently announced additional funding for the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program which, on the government’s own projections, is the equivalent of only around $33 per homeless person per year. It is not even enough to buy a homeless person a roof over their head and a meal for one night, much less for a year.

This is a token commitment which makes a mockery of any serious plans to halve homelessness by 2020. Even the Prime Minister and the Minister for Housing have now conceded that the rate of homelessness has risen since this pledge was made. Indeed, in a recent report in the *Australian* newspaper entitled ‘Kevin Rudd losing the fight on homeless’ a number of welfare agencies that are closely involved in addressing the issue of homeless people in a very practical and personal way on a daily basis indicated that, in their estimation, even though official statistics are yet to come out, homelessness has risen in Australia since the Prime Minister made this pledge. I know, from speaking to welfare organisations in my own electorate—to Doncare, for example—that this is an issue which is of great concern to them, as it is to similar organisations right throughout the country.

We believe that the Prime Minister must explain why we should take his promise any more seriously than his promise to fix hospitals or to put a computer on every secondary student’s desk or to turn back the illegal boat arrivals. There is a major problem and it is, as the Prime Minister said, a national obscenity. But it is wrong to promise dramatic improvements without the architecture to actually deliver those improvements. Remember Bob Hawke’s empty promise: ‘No child will live in poverty by 1990.’ It would be a tragedy for homeless people in Australia if that promise, full of the usual hyperbole that we get from the Prime Minister, cannot be achieved and indeed if the architecture is not in place to realistically have a chance of delivering upon that promise. As I said, early indications are that things have gotten worse, not better, since the promise was made.

The government’s failure to deal with the housing affordability crisis, which the Prime Minister described as the ‘ultimate barbecue stopper,’ places enormous pressure on all other areas of the housing market. Less affordable housing means more stress on private rentals, which means more stress on social housing, which, in turn, means more people on the streets who cannot get into the market whatsoever. This is at the base of the problem that we are dealing with. Homelessness, if you like, is at the end of the line. It is the problems further up the line in terms of housing affordability and availability across this country that have tragic consequences for those who are homeless around this nation.

As I said, the coalition does not oppose this measure. It believes it is a good measure that will assist many who are at risk of homelessness to better balance their budget. It is an important measure, but it needs to be supplemented with the necessary social support and other measures to ensure that what has been promised is indeed delivered to the Australian people.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10.38 am)—In making my contribution to this debate on the Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 I am pleased to hear that the opposition will not oppose this measure. Although, in listening to the previous speaker, the member for Menzies, I am not 100 per cent convinced that, when it
comes to the crunch, they will not oppose this measure just for the sake of opposition. We on this side of the House have become very familiar with the fact that the opposition, under Tony Abbott, will oppose absolutely every piece of legislation that comes before the House. It does not surprise me that speakers on the other side have tried to highlight negative aspects of homelessness and programs designed to address homelessness.

It is interesting that this legislation has been developed after a series of trials. I should state at the outset of my contribution that this bill makes weekly payments available to certain vulnerable customers of Centrelink or people who are homeless. The bill also makes a small number of technical corrections which are unrelated to the main part of the bill.

As I was saying, this legislation has been developed from previously conducted trials that showed that weekly payments were beneficial to a number of people who receive welfare and are struggling, for various reasons, to maintain a budget over the fortnightly period. One of those trials was in the town camps in Alice Springs. The trials were carried out from September 2001 to March 2003 as part of a broader trial of culturally sensitive banking and financial services in the town camp communities. These trials showed that there was some benefit in the weekly payments. At that time they were funded through FaCSIA, and the aim of them was to break the ‘feast and famine’ cycle. Siobhan McDonnell, a former visiting fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, studied the results of this trial, and she found that there was indeed some benefit to be obtained from providing weekly payments. There was also another trial that took place within the broader community. As with the town camp trial that I have already referred to, it was found that there were some benefits associated with weekly payments.

The trials sought to determine the costs and benefits of weekly payment arrangements both for the people who were taking part in the trial and for other stakeholders. They included Centrelink, social workers, support services that catered for the needs of disadvantaged welfare recipients, and Centrelink staff who had to deal with many of the people that were constantly requesting advances or urgent payments because they were unable to manage receiving their payments fortnightly. The results of these trials support the extension of the scheme.

Michael Raper from the National Welfare Rights Network, based on feedback provided to him by community groups, said that the weekly payment trial worked well for very vulnerable clients and that they had been able to turn their lives around, with improved health and personal outcomes, more stable accommodation and reduced costs for and demands on the health and legal services. So, when you look at it from the background of the trials that were conducted by the Howard government and that I suspect members on the other side of this House supported, you would have to wonder why we have had some of the contributions to the debate we have had today.

Weekly payments on their own will not be sufficient to turn around the lives of people who are suffering severe disadvantage. There will need to be programs that run in conjunction with the weekly payments scheme—programs that help people get their finances in order and help them with daily living skills and with problems that they may have in their lives at that particular time.

One of the major problems faced by people who are struggling with the fortnightly payments is homelessness, and we have heard homelessness mentioned this morning on a couple of occasions. The member for Blair stated—and it is common knowledge—that on any one
night there are 105,000 people in Australia who are homeless. That is why the Rudd government is investing $1.2 billion in trying to turn around and address the issue of homelessness. In Shortland electorate there are homeless people, but quite often those homeless people are hidden because they move on a daily basis from home to home to home. You do not have many visual pictures of people sleeping on the streets, but you have many people who are unable to find accommodation. Under the Howard government money that was invested in social housing was ripped away from the states. One of the actions of the Rudd government that I am very proud of is that of massively increasing money to the states to build social housing.

In Shortland electorate there are 2,000 people on the eastern side of Lake Macquarie and in Wyong shire waiting for social housing. The person who has been on the waiting list the longest has been on it for 18 years—that is, 18 years waiting for social housing. I think that that is unconscionable; I do not think it is good enough. I do not think it is good enough that, on a daily basis, we have people in Shortland electorate sleeping in their cars; I do not think it is good enough that, on a daily basis, we have families moving from house to house to house; I do not think it is good enough that we have families who are forced to live in tents; and I do not think it is good enough that, for a very long period of time, the issue of homelessness was ignored and the previous government failed to act to address the need. It is little wonder when you hear the Leader of the Opposition make statements such as the one in Perth in mid-February when he said that you cannot stop homelessness, basically attributing it to the fault of the individual and implying that people choose to be homeless. That shows what a sheltered life the Leader of the Opposition has led. It shows that he has never really been faced with true adversity in his life. It is very easy to make those statements when you come from a very privileged background, when you have been offered the best of education—attended private schools and gone to university—and your life has flowed along smoothly. I have news for the Leader of the Opposition: anyone can become homeless, and we do need to have in place the proper support for people who are homeless.

I was also most disappointed when I read a report in the newspaper about a Liberal party forum, a get-together, here in Canberra, where everyone sat down and tossed around a few ideas. The Leader of the Opposition had some very strong thoughts on welfare and welfare payments. Basically, he felt that welfare payments to disadvantaged people were not something to be guaranteed universally—that every person who received a welfare payment should have to work for that welfare payment and that it was a privilege, not a right, to receive a welfare payment.

Taking that a step further, you come to the conclusion that there will be a massive increase in the number of people that are homeless and that Australia will move away from what I have always been proud of as an Australian: the ideal that every Australian will be supported in their time of need and that as a nation we can afford to look after those people that are more disadvantaged than others. We do this, as I said, through social housing and through the strategies that have been put in place in relation to housing. We do it through ensuring that there are payments in place for people when they are disadvantaged.

The weekly payment scheme will be a scheme that will really benefit those people most disadvantaged in the community. It will enable the family tax benefit to be paid on a weekly basis and it will allow for the baby and social security periodic payments to be paid on a
weekly basis. There is great interest in the community in relation to this particular piece of legislation. I received a phone call from the social work department at the Mater hospital in the Hunter asking about this information. They had identified that this would be a really good program to assist those people they were dealing with who have trouble handling their finances.

I strongly support this piece of legislation that we have before us today. I condemn the Leader of the Opposition for the statements he has made about homelessness. I would like him to read the white paper, *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*. I would like him to open up his mind and to be a little bit more compassionate. I would like the members on the other side of this House to give real thought to the issues that surround the most disadvantaged people in our community. It is more than paying lip-service to disadvantage. It is more than standing up and attributing increases in homelessness to increases in prices, trying to play the blame game, trying to trivialise the issue, because that is what they are doing.

In the whole time they were in power the Howard government did nothing, absolutely nothing, to address homelessness. They did nothing whatsoever to improve the lives of those people that are most disadvantaged. Instead, they made it harder for people who were homeless to access their social security payments. They made it harder for people who were most disadvantaged to get their lives together, to get their lives back on track and to be able to access the services that were available in the community. It was under the Howard government that so many people were breached and a number of those people that were breached suffered severe financial hardship. Those people were often homeless and if they were not homeless the actions of the Howard government of the time led to them become homeless.

This is a very, very constructive piece of legislation. It will help the most disadvantaged people in our community. This, coupled with the right sort of support programs, will help people turn their lives around.

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (10.54 am)—I speak in support of the Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010. This bill enables weekly payments to be made to a class of persons who receive social security periodic payments, family tax benefit or the baby bonus. It is aimed at those people who are assessed as being vulnerable, such as those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Historically, most welfare and family assistance payments have been made in Australia on a fortnightly cycle. This has been sufficient for most but not all recipients. In particular, some people suffering disadvantage due to homelessness, mental health issues, alcohol or substance abuse conditions are unable to organise a budget—not only over a fortnightly period but sometimes over any period at all. Many of these vulnerable people may spend their entire fortnightly payment in only a few days or, as circumstances have been related to me, in one day. The knock-on effect is that food and shelter may then be unaffordable for the remaining days of the fortnight, leading to health and accommodation problems for those affected and their families.

There have been trials of weekly payments for welfare recipients in the past which, by published accounts, have been quite successful. As the member for Shortland mentioned only a few minutes ago, the first of these trials were started back in 2001 in Alice Springs town camps. Although that trial ran through until 2003, it was not stand-alone; there was a broader package that went with it of assistance for people in those town camps, including culturally
sensitive banking and financial services. That trial was funded by the then Department of Family and Community Services, and it was intended to address the problems associated with the feast and famine cycle that had accompanied fortnightly payments for some recipients. A report on the trial, titled *Chasing the money story: an evaluation of the Tangentyere bank pilot project and its relevance to Indigenous communities in Central Australia*, was undertaken by Siobhan McDonnell, a former visiting fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. This report was generally supportive of the use of weekly payments but also noted some problems with the implementation.

These problems included problems with Centrelink putting the weekly payment system in place and people choosing to leave the trial and revert to fortnightly payments, as weekly payments were sometimes insufficient to allow them to make purchases of large or highly priced items. However, the report found the weekly payments were helpful to some people, especially if additional services were provided as well and that they were worth making more widely available. In particular, though, the report found that if weekly payments were to be successful then they should be of a voluntary nature. A broader trial was then undertaken in 2005, again by the then Department of Family and Community Services. It ran through until 2006. This trial provided for the option of weekly payments to disadvantaged welfare recipients at 69 Centrelink customer service centres, with the majority of those being in South Australia and Western Australia. Around 1,700 recipients signed up for involvement in this larger trial, with most of them being paid a disability support pension and suffering from some form of mental illness. This trial also offered access to other support services to assist in stabilising clients’ circumstances so was not limited to weekly payments as a form of assistance.

The then President of the National Welfare Rights Network, Michael Raper, was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 7 April 2006 as saying that as a result of the weekly payments trial:

… very vulnerable clients have been able to turn their lives around with improved health and personal outcomes, more stable accommodation and reduced costs in terms of demands on the health and legal systems.

Given the reported success of the trial, Michael Raper was ‘at a loss as to why it was being wound up’. As I understand it, the trial was only undertaken on a limited basis, mainly due to legislative restrictions at the time. Therefore, this bill before the House provides for vulnerable income support recipients to receive weekly payments through two part payments in respect of their 14-day instalment period, thus fixing up the legislative problems of the previous trial. The effect is to treat the two part payments as though they were a single payment being paid at the end of the fortnightly instalment period.

In December 2008, the Rudd government released the homelessness white paper titled *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*. The intent of the white paper is to provide for a national plan of action on homelessness for the years leading up to 2020. Three strategies were identified in the report to tackle homelessness: a focus on early intervention in the provision of homelessness services; a need for increased responsiveness to and connectivity between homelessness services to achieve better outcomes in relation to sustainable housing whilst improving economic and social participation and reducing the level of homelessness; and moving homeless people quickly out of crisis accommodation and into stable housing along with the necessary support to ensure that homelessness does not become recur-
rent. Contained within the first strategy was a recommendation for the weekly payment of income support. Weekly payments for vulnerable people will be voluntary under this bill, and Centrelink will be able to flag likely claimants who may need this support.

Homelessness can happen to virtually anyone due to an unexpected change of circumstances. It happens right across society, and in many cases it does not matter which suburb you live in or your family circumstances. The census in 2006 revealed that 105,000 people were homeless on census night. A breakdown of the percentages showed 56 per cent were male; 21 per cent were between the ages of 12 and 18; 12 per cent were under the age of 12; 23 per cent were staying in boarding houses; 45 per cent were staying with friends and relatives; 16 per cent were sleeping rough; and 14 per cent were staying in accommodation provided by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. Of course, what the census did not include was the people who were not in the census, and I do not know how many people that is—probably no-one really does know the real figure. What I do know is that it is addition to that 105,000 that were actually recorded in the census. Nearly half of the 105,000 Australians who are homeless on a given night are under the age of 25, and more than 12,000 are children. As the white paper explained, homelessness can affect children, families and older people just as insidiously as single people who are in difficulty for whatever reason. Our Indigenous population is affected out of proportion to their numbers, and those with mental illness are often among the homeless, especially following the deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill in the 1980s.

The Rudd Labor government has already demonstrated commitment about how serious it is in dealing with the issue of homelessness with measures that provide an extra $1.1 billion to boost services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and by increasing spending on homeless services by 55 per cent. There are measures such as an additional 80,000 social and affordable homes to the national housing stock, with 30,000 through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and another 50,000 through the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Also, there is the investment of around $80 million in emergency relief and financial counselling services.

In recent weeks we have seen the announcement of funding for both emergency relief and financial counselling in my electorate of Deakin, and I am happy to commend the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, for taking these vital measures to address these problems not only in Deakin but right across the country. Deakin covers the eastern suburbs in Melbourne, and some people have the perception that all is fine in what look like nice settled, stable suburbs. But I can certainly tell the House that we have a high incidence of homelessness in those suburbs.

Sometimes it is hidden away, but you do not have to go very far to find evidence of it. You can go down to any of the local welfare services and they can tell you how many people on a daily basis they are dealing with and, even worse, how many people they have to turn away because they do not have the accommodation: it is not there. The Rudd Labor government is funding 41 specialist homelessness projects across our housing programs to provide more than 1,680 new units of accommodation.

Centrelink also provides specialist support for homeless people; income support for those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and socially excluded; and an indicator in its systems to identify homeless clients or clients who are at risk of homelessness. There is also the network
of community engagement officers to work with NGOs like drug and alcohol rehab services, mental health services, hostels, boarding houses, refuges and drop-in centres. Centrelink also provides counselling, access to Centrepay and other support programs, and referral to community services if required. I have two Centrelink offices that service my electorate. They are both staffed with wonderful people who really go out of their way to assist those who come in their doors. Sometimes I wonder how they manage to do it all in one day; they really do get through a lot of work. They do a great job out there, but local issues mean that they are often overwhelmed as well. It is a big issue that goes right across the country.

I also note that the provision of weekly payments has been welcomed by Clare Martin, CEO of ACOSS, who said:

ACOSS welcomes this move by the Government which will help severely disadvantaged people access their payments on a weekly, rather than fortnightly, basis …

…

Homeless people in particular can struggle to maintain a budget and often operate on a day-to-day basis rather than in fortnightly cycles. Giving people a choice to receive payments weekly will empower them to take control of their finances, minimise hardship and prevent people from slipping into homelessness.

This proposal has also received support from Homelessness Australia, the national peak body working to prevent and respond to homelessness in Australia.

The changes implemented in this bill are small for most of us, but they are very necessary and worthwhile measures that seek to reduce homelessness, and for those who are in that position these changes are not small; I suspect they will be rather large. As the white paper states:

Investing in services to prevent and reduce homelessness delivers benefits not only to those vulnerable to homelessness but also to the entire community.

I commend this bill to the House.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (11.07 am)—In supporting the Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010, I note the good work being done by an agency in my electorate called Goori House, headed up by John Close and supported ably by David Carson and Dr Bill Deacon. I also note the hostel and rehabilitation services that they offer to homeless people in my electorate and, in fact, the whole greater Brisbane area.

Many of those homeless people are struggling with the demons of drugs and alcohol and are trying to find their way back by learning new skills in a residential setting that is now, I am pleased to say, back in vogue after a number of years when we believed that residential rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol was not cost effective. I am glad to see that over the last five years that has changed and that the benefits of centres like Goori are now recognised.

Yesterday they opened the men’s shed, which is an important opportunity for young men to earn certificates I and II in basic trades—great steps back into self-worth and the belief that they can contribute again in society, leaving behind the years lost to drugs and alcohol. I also congratulate their partners: the Redland City Council, Miller Communications, Finlandia Village, Faith Lutheran College and Bendigo Bank.

On another notion of the important investments that have been made in public housing, I note while the minister is here that we have seen, in the search for shovel-ready programs and the commendable effort to see public housing built on occasion in places like Narangba and
Mary Street, Birkdale, a rushing of the process. We can understand that there is some haste required, but environmental concerns and communication with the local communities have been lost in the effort to build these public housing facilities quickly. The request to state governments, I acknowledge, was to find shovel-ready locations that did not have to go through the full council approval process, and in many cases developers raised their hand and said, ‘Please take this block of land.’

I want to tell the Mary Street story very briefly as it applies to addressing homelessness in my community. What happened was that, because it was deemed code-assessable, a very crude division was done. The 2-6 Mary Street block was 4,000 square metres. It was divided by 200 square metres per dwelling, allowing 20 units. Only 12 car parking spots were included in the development. That is of great concern in a fairly small street where there is a childcare centre on one side and a school on the other. People were desperately concerned about the impact the traffic would have, the access for emergency vehicles and the significant koala overlay on the block being ignored. I am glad to say that the Queensland government has moved to freeze this development until further consideration occurs.

I want to acknowledge in particular Margaret and James Hardy, Karen and Simon Clark, Maree and Neil Hickson, and Willa Venz, who worked very hard to mobilise the community, which knew nothing about this development until very early in February—and that in itself is a breakdown of communication which we should not tolerate from any level of government. When the state Labor member was informed, there was a very quick series of community meetings, and another one is planned for this Saturday. It looks like the community has succeeded in having the koala overlay considered. At the present time, with only 12 car parks proposed for 20 units, anyone could look at those plans and see that there will be traffic chaos, as would be the case with any 20-unit development. The notion that people who live in public housing do not own motor vehicles I think is a thing of the past. This is outer metropolitan urban living, and virtually everyone owns a car in this day and age.

I would like to see those vehicle-to-dwelling ratios adhered to. Even if it is a state government spending federal government stimulus money, that does not allow them to steamroll a local council. I would like to have those laws protected in particular cases. The corridors of koala vegetation overlays in the very delicate ecologies of outer metropolitan Brisbane, where our koalas travel from, say, Thorneside to Birkdale and through to Belmont, need to be very carefully protected. We can do environmentally sensitive development if we think about it. It takes a little bit more time; it takes a bit more care from the state offices. But we can solve this homelessness problem with more public housing, which is welcomed in my electorate, without necessarily destroying valuable koala feeding trees and their root systems. Certainly it is as simple as can be. Moving a retaining wall, altering the foundations and moving car parks into locations where they will not harm trees would be a very noble objective and we would still have a happy community welcoming public housing instead of what has happened in this case, which has been the reverse.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (11.11 am)—It is my pleasure to add my support to the Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010. This bill of course implements another key reform set out in the Australian government’s white paper *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, which was released in December 2008 by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and the Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek. As
the minister is in the chamber today, can I acknowledge the wonderful work that she is doing in relation to housing and homelessness. It is a very important issue not just for my electorate but across Australia. I will get to my electorate in more detail shortly.

The white paper outlined a plan for reducing homelessness in Australia by 2020 with specific goals to halve overall homelessness and provide accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it. There are currently 105,000 homeless people in Australia, of whom around 16,000 sleep rough. The white paper provided a huge injection of funds, an additional $1.2 billion over four years, a 55 per cent increase in investment in homelessness and a substantial downpayment on a 12-year reform agenda. It included a commitment of $800 million over the next four years for new support services for homeless people and $400 million over the next two financial years for social housing to house the homeless. This injection of funds is part of the $15.1 billion package agreed by the Council of Australian Governments to stimulate the economy and generate up to 133,000 jobs over coming years. In response to the overwhelming feedback from consultations on the green paper, the white paper focused on three core strategies: turning off the tap, better prevention of homelessness and improving and expanding services to help more homeless people, breaking the cycle of homelessness by providing long-term housing and support.

Through the new funding provided by the Rudd Labor government and through reforms made by this government, we aim to help up to 9,000 more young people to remain connected with their families, help up to 2,250 more families at risk of homelessness to stay housed, provide day-to-day support to an extra 1,000 adults with mental illness, build up to 2,700 additional public and community houses for low-income households that are at risk of homelessness, fund a network of 90 community engagement officers within Centrelink to support people at risk of homelessness, build up to 4,200 new houses and upgrade up to 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities and allocate aged care places and capital funds for at least one new specialist facility for older homeless people every year for the next four years.

Centrelink has a critical role to play in reducing and preventing homelessness. We know that Centrelink provides income support payments to 6½ million people, many of whom are disadvantaged, vulnerable and socially excluded. As a key first-to-know agency, Centrelink is well placed to identify people who are at risk of homelessness and assist them with stabilising their housing situation. Centrelink has already introduced an indicator in its systems to identify clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This indicator will let Centrelink staff know that the client needs active follow-up from a Centrelink social worker to make sure that they are receiving the support that they need to stay housed. The indicator allows Centrelink to improve and tailor its services to the people who are most vulnerable to homelessness.

In October last year, Centrelink also began to establish its network of Centrelink community engagement officers. This program now has 90 specialist staff located across all capital cities and many regional centres. They support some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

This bill provides another reform to be implemented by Centrelink under the Australian government’s white paper on homelessness. As part of the Australian government’s efforts to prevent homelessness, we are introducing weekly payments of income support payments for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We know that some Australians have
difficulty budgeting and spend their fortnightly welfare payments too quickly. This can mean that they are left with no money to pay rent, buy food or pay for essential services. Vulnerable customers who are being supported by Centrelink staff will be able to choose to receive their income support payments weekly instead of fortnightly. While the payment amount will stay the same, weekly payments will allow the most disadvantaged welfare payment customers to budget more easily. It will also give these vulnerable Australians an opportunity to stabilise and improve their circumstances.

Another important aspect of this measure is its extension to recipients of the family tax benefit. I commend the component of the bill that allows families on income support that also receive the family tax benefit to receive their family tax benefit weekly as well. The family tax benefit is critical to helping many low-income families in my electorate and around the country in making ends meet and enabling the family tax benefit payments to be received weekly along with income support payments is yet another example of this government’s commitment to a responsive and flexible family support system.

In my electorate, more than 13,000 families receive family tax benefit A and more than 10,400 receive family tax benefit B, with many of these families receiving both. I am certainly proud to support the bill as yet another example of the Rudd government delivering on its promises to tackle homelessness and support families and individuals that are under financial pressure. I certainly know that many vulnerable people in Petrie will benefit from this bill. I heard the member for Bowman speaking about some of the local organisations in his electorate. I have many wonderful community organisations in my electorate that do amazing work. The minister and the Prime Minister have spoken at length about the organisations that they have visited around this country to discuss what this government’s future policies should be in addressing homelessness. There are organisations such as the Orana Youth Shelter and Chameleon House, which are the only two youth shelters in my electorate. They do wonderful work in supporting our young people. But they have to send away far too many young people on a daily basis.

There is the Redcliffe Community Association and the Redcliffe Area Youth Service, which do wonderful work in supporting our young people and also many women with children who have been subject to domestic violence who find themselves homeless. They also help those people suffering mental illness who, as a consequence of their medical condition, find themselves homeless. These groups deal with these situations and these real people every day. There is the North Moreton Public Tenants Association, the Deception Bay Neighbourhood Centre, Near North Housing, the Deception Bay Child and Family Alliance, Boys Town Deception Bay, the Deception Bay Community Youth programs and the Youth Advisory Group. These are all groups, among many others, who do wonderful work locally. But we need to do more, and as a government we need to support these community organisations.

I heard one of the members, the member for Deakin, saying earlier that anyone could find themselves homeless. In fact, I remember having a conversation with a woman back in 2007, when I was a candidate. This woman explained to me how she was a stay-at-home mum with two young children. Her husband was a middle-income worker. They never considered themselves to be struggling. He was a middle-income earner; she was at home raising the kids. They were in rental property. They thought they were doing well until one day they were given notice that the property owner wanted them to vacate because he wanted to renovate
and put the property on the market. The woman and her family found themselves in a very
difficult position, trying to get into another rental property that was affordable for them. In
fact they ended up moving into a local caravan park with their family. The even thought that
this was acceptable, except that the caravan park notified them that they were closing down.
And suddenly this family, who never saw themselves as struggling and never thought they
could ever become homeless, found themselves in a situation where they were about to be
living out of their car. Friends stepped in and helped them and eventually they got back into
another rental property.

That is an example of how easy it is to become homeless. We always think that it is people
who come from difficult relationships, who have some health issues or who are long-term
unemployed who end up homeless. But anyone can end up homeless. I know that the white
paper identified that of the 105,000 homeless up to 23 per cent fall into the category of older
people and that children form up to 22 per cent according to the census data in 2006. Families
made up up to 11 per cent and rough sleepers made up 16 per cent of the homeless.

I know there are many young people in my electorate who are sleeping rough, sleeping on
friends’ couches or moving around every night. I have had men who manage boarding houses
in my area say to me: ‘Yvette, we don’t know what to do; these women turn up on our door-
step with young children. This is not an appropriate place for them to stay. We’re concerned
about their safety. This isn’t a good environment for the children. We can’t take them in but
what else can we do?’ There are many of us working on how we can change this situation lo-
cally.

Redcliffe Area Youth Space in their last annual report looked at the predominant issues that
they encountered as a youth service. In 2007-08 homelessness was a predominant issue in 62
per cent of cases, up seven per cent. In 2008-09 the homelessness was a predominant issue in
75 per cent of cases. That was up 13 per cent from the previous year. So this problem is grow-
ing. Interestingly, mental health was a predominant issue in 90 per cent of cases. So there is a
link there, and it is a link that we cannot ignore—nor is the government ignoring it.

I am very pleased that the government has said that in our health reforms and future an-
nouncements we will be very much focusing on mental health, because that is an important
area. I am pleased that the government is dealing with homelessness through its previous an-
nouncements and through this bill and that through the stimulus package and nation building
there is extra social housing. In terms of refurbishments, repairs and maintenance, in my area
alone 374 social housing units are being repaired. I know that those repairs included provid-
ing safer bathrooms for elderly people, support baths, wider doorways and fans to keep them
cooler. The fact is that our summers are getting hotter, especially in Brisbane and Queensland,
and with safety as a major priority, heat stress is a major problem for elderly people.

I was pleased, when I was talking to the Queensland government’s QBuild operators, to
learn that they had put in a large number of ceiling fans into the one- and two-bedroom units
that elderly people are living in, in social housing throughout the electorate. We are also
building another 43 social housing units and I know that the Urban Land Development Au-
thority and the Brisbane Housing Company are building new rental affordability properties in
Fitzgibbon. That is another fantastic announcement.

While we are doing all this wonderful work, unfortunately, there is a lot of obstruction
from the opposition. I would hate to see more obstruction in any areas that deal with the
homelessness issue. In just the past year 41 bills have been obstructed in the Senate. That is four times the average number of bills that have been obstructed by any opposition over the last 30 years. While we are trying to be fiscally responsible and to make sure that taxpayer dollars are going into those really important areas that we need them to go into, such as health and homelessness, we have the opposition leader, Tony Abbott, now wanting to increase costs for households by introducing a great big new tax through a paid parental leave scheme. He does not want to fund it in a responsible way; he wants to tax big business to ensure that those costs will then flow on to households, and women particularly will feel the pressures of those increasing costs to their home. There is no point in giving paid parental leave when every time parents go to the supermarket it is going to cost them more to get food, to get essential services and to clothe their children. These costs will flow. We know these costs will flow, and it is at the very least disappointing. It fails the Australian community in putting forward these proposals. But it is my pleasure to be part of the Rudd Labor government, which is actually not just fiscally responsible but is looking after those important areas of our community such as homelessness, and I am very pleased to commend this bill to the House.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (11.27 am)—The Social Security and Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 implements a key reform of the Australian government’s white paper, *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, which was released in December 2008. To support the government’s goal to halve homelessness and to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020, state and territory governments and the Commonwealth together have committed more than $1.1 billion to increase services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. On top of this, a further 80,000 social and affordable homes will be added to Australian housing stock by 2012 through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and through our National Rental Affordability Scheme, as well as the measures for remote Indigenous housing.

The white paper on homelessness committed all governments to work hard to prevent homelessness, to give people the support they need to remain in their homes and to link our new housing initiatives with the intensive specialist support that is needed to break the cycle of homelessness. We know that there is a critical need for housing and we have acted to boost its supply, but resolving homelessness is not just about providing a roof and four walls. There are a number of other challenges that people need to overcome to find housing and to stay housed. The government’s white paper highlights the need to address these challenges.

Centrelink, as the critical first-to-know agency, plays a crucial part in addressing these challenges, and I really want to congratulate the management and staff of Centrelink for the thought and effort that they have put into addressing this issue of homelessness. Centrelink’s role in identifying people who are at risk of homelessness is critical to reducing and preventing homelessness as well as helping people stabilise their housing situation, and Centrelink has been both willing and able to change the way that it has traditionally worked to better support people who are vulnerable to homelessness.

Centrelink is responsible for providing 6½ million customers, many of whom are disadvantaged and vulnerable, with income support payments. Centrelink has introduced procedures to identify customers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who may require extra assistance from a Centrelink social worker to get the support they need to stay housed. En-
hancing Centrelink’s ability to identify people at risk of homelessness will enable the Australian government to improve and tailor our service to those people who are most vulnerable to homelessness, and it will prevent people from becoming homeless.

Centrelink, in October 2009, established its Centrelink community engagement officers across Australia. These officers are working with non-government organisations such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, mental health services, hostels, boarding houses, refuges and drop-in centres to provide some of the most vulnerable people in our community with better access to income support and other services available through Centrelink. I cannot stress enough how important this role is. We know that there are a number of people who are homeless who have no income because they are illiterate or, for mental health reasons, they are unable to cope with filling in their Centrelink forms or going into a Centrelink office. Getting these people the income that they are entitled to under our social security system is the first and most critical step to finding and maintaining a roof over their head. With no money coming in, there is absolutely no way that you can keep a roof over your head.

This bill delivers another critical Centrelink reform. As part of the Australian government’s strategy to prevent homelessness, this bill introduces weekly payments for the first time for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We know that some Australians can find themselves in financial difficulty as they have problems budgeting and spend their fortnightly welfare payments too quickly. In some cases, we know that vulnerable people—again, often people who suffer with a mental illness—can be imposed upon by people they see as friends to hand over their fortnightly payment. This can result in their having no money to pay for all of the essentials—obviously, rent, food and other necessities. These vulnerable customers will be able to choose to receive their income support payments weekly instead of fortnightly. It is important to emphasise that this is a voluntary measure but one that has been enthusiastically accepted by many people during the trial period and, indeed, by welfare organisations who support the most vulnerable Australians.

Although the total amount of a person’s welfare payment will stay the same, making payments weekly will allow the most disadvantaged welfare payment customers to budget more easily. It will also give these vulnerable Australians an opportunity to stabilise and improve their circumstances. Currently, for people receiving social security payments, the social security law is unclear about whether the secretary has the discretion to determine that more than one payment can be made in respect of an instalment period. This bill clarifies that, for individuals in a declared class, a social security payment may be made on a weekly basis in respect of a 14-day instalment period. Accordingly, weekly payments will be made available to customers on commencement of a legislative instrument defining ‘vulnerable customer’.

The bill also makes changes to the family assistance law. Vulnerable customers who receive family tax benefit in addition to income support will be given the opportunity to receive their income support payment weekly. At present, the government’s intention is to limit weekly payments to income support payments while retaining family assistance payments on a fortnightly basis. However, this bill amends the family assistance law and introduces the capacity to make weekly payments for family tax benefit and baby bonus, allowing the government to respond to changing circumstances as necessary.

These changes are intended to assist Australia’s most vulnerable people, who are experiencing financial hardship, and consequently to prevent these people from becoming homeless.
It is an important measure. Once again, I want to congratulate the management and staff of Centrelink, who, although they are a very large organisation, focused very efficiently and nimbly on the part they can play in reducing the vulnerability of people to homelessness and to helping homeless Australians stabilise their lives, get a roof over their heads and move on to more regular and rewarding lives.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (11.35 am)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

**Victoria: Antisocial Behaviour**

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (11.35 am)—I rise to, again, raise my concern about the increasing street violence and antisocial behaviour in our wider community. I would also like to highlight the complete failure of the Brumby Labor government to deal with the issue and the need for a national strategy and more resources to combat the problem. We have all seen the headlines in relation to increased violence on the streets of Melbourne and the much-publicised attacks on Indian students. Unfortunately, Premier Brumby seems to be in denial in relation to these issues and refuses to acknowledge the extent of the problem in Victoria.

This is not just a Melbourne issue. The issue is of concern to people right throughout regional Victoria. Statistics released last year showed that, since 2006-07, assaults in the Traralgon area increased by 15 per cent. I would like to refer to a recent article in the *Latrobe Valley Express* newspaper where McDonald’s Traralgon owner, Darren Cowell, who is a respected local businessman, was so concerned about the safety of his staff that he had to cut back on business hours. About three weeks ago one of his security guards was assaulted with a weapon and during that same weekend a staff member was assaulted as they waited for a taxi at about six o’clock in the morning. I would just like to quote from Mr Cowell’s comments to the *Latrobe Valley Express*. He said:

… I got to the stage where I just didn’t want my people exposed to that …

… We couldn’t control it anymore and there was an increase in incidents at the weekends.

… When staff are being assaulted waiting to go home, that was the last point for me.

These attacks affect everyone. In this case it means fewer working hours for the staff. It has also had a severe economic impact on them. It has also had considerable social impacts on people in the region in that they are too afraid to walk home at night. I fear that the state government’s response in this case has been woefully inadequate. Undoubtedly, the best deterrent for this type of activity is a visual presence of police on the streets. We cannot believe the numbers that we see allocated to our police stations, because the actual officers are simply not there. There are vacancies on the books. They simply do not have the staff on the beat that they are meant to have. Police resourcing, I believe, is one of the keys to this problem. It is not just a weekend blitz or a one-night operation. We need to have an ongoing strong presence in these areas where it is known that trouble has been occurring.
Last week I had the pleasure of hosting the federal Leader of the Nationals, Warren Truss, in my electorate. We met with senior police in the Latrobe Valley and, to be fair to the police, they are doing their absolute best with the resources available to them, but they do need to have the numbers they are entitled to under their current allocations.

As I have previously told the House I believe that increased police numbers and more security at these known trouble spots is just part of the solution. We also need to change the laws regarding liquor licences. We need to impose harsher penalties on these gang offenders who commit these mass attacks. We need to act decisively and take licences off poor business operators and we need to work harder to change the culture which appears to have desensitised people, particularly young people, to violence. I fear that there has been a cultural change which is linked to a lack of respect towards our police, a lack of respect for other individuals and a lack of respect for community standards at large. This culture simply has to change. We need to be serious in our efforts to change the culture in the community of excessive consumption of alcohol. We do not need Mickey Mouse schemes like increased taxes on ready-to-drink products, which we have seen with the so-called alcopops tax. It is much harder than that. These are much more significant issues and it will take a whole-of-community response. Change is needed in our behaviour, in our own homes, at our sporting clubs, at community functions and in the behaviour of our sporting role models, whom many people look up to. I have also spoken previously about the need for governments at all levels to do whatever they can to keep investing in our sporting and community clubs which have a youth focus. We need to provide positive examples for young people to get involved in alcohol-free activities in our community and help to develop a sense of belonging within the community.

I would like to refer to a friend of mine who passed away quite recently, Doc McKenzie, a life member of the Lakes Entrance Surf Lifesaving Club. Doc always used to say that the local police never had any trouble with the kids from the surf club. Whether it was because they were too busy or too tired after being on the beach all day, I am not sure, but they certainly had a sense of community and a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves. I think it is a real credit to organisations like surf lifesaving and other community and sporting organisations that provide those positive examples for young people. As I mentioned before, those habits which are formed early in life are certainly likely to stay with people as they mature and go on to become well-regarded and well-respected members of our community.

I want to say at the outset that improving community safety and reducing violence needs to become a national priority. The federal government should be providing more funding to help local communities find their own solutions. I met recently with the Traralgon CBD Safety Committee, which has been working in partnership with the local council, the police, the entertainment industry and the taxi industry to help clean up the streets in the Traralgon area. They have been seeking funding for closed-circuit television and a night-rider bus service, but both the state and the federal Labor governments are, at this stage, refusing to support those applications. The government really should be supporting some of these local solutions to local problems. In this case the initiatives have the support of local police, the local business community and the local council. So I urge both the state and the federal governments to start getting serious about the issue of community based crime and street violence and to start working with their communities to develop local solutions. (Time expired)
Chile: Earthquake

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (11.40 am)—As Chair of the Australia/Chile Parliamentary Friendship Group I offer my condolences and, I am sure, the condolences of all members of this parliament to the people of Chile, as well as the Chilean community in Australia, for the damage and destruction that has been caused in that country by the recent earthquake. On 27 February, an earthquake registering 8.8 in magnitude occurred near the city of Concepcion, just over 300 kilometres south-west of the Chilean capital, Santiago. It was one of the most powerful earthquakes in recorded history and caused devastation from the capital right through central Chile and into the south. There is very major damage in Concepcion and in other towns.

Chileans are a strong and resilient people. As floods and fires are for many Australians, earthquakes and tremors are a part of life for Chileans. But the fifth most powerful earthquake on record—since 1900—is one of the worst to have hit Chile and has left some areas of the country in ruins. Continuing earthquakes in the affected region since 27 February are described as ‘aftershocks’, which is technically right but understates their magnitude: some of these aftershocks are in themselves major earthquakes. Hundreds of people have perished and millions have been affected by this earthquake. With searches still in progress for missing people, the death toll is expected to rise. Much of Chile’s infrastructure and hundreds of thousands of homes and beautiful heritage architecture in many cities and towns have been damaged and destroyed in this disaster.

Thankfully, the damage and death toll have not reached the scale of devastation seen in Haiti earlier this year, despite the fact that the Chilean earthquake was stronger. Chile can thank its strongly designed buildings, well organised society and geographical nature for managing to limit the catastrophe to what it is. Coastal towns, in particular, have borne the brunt of the destruction, with tsunami waves crashing into the already earthquake-affected cities and towns.

For me, this disaster hit home at a personal level. I have deep ties and a great affection for Chile. One of my sons is currently in Chile on student exchange. Much to our relief, he is safe. I have fond memories of travelling and living in Chile with my wife and family, and to think of how this tragedy is affecting the whole Chilean community brings us much sadness.

Australia has a longstanding, close and warm relationship with Chile. At the beginning of the last century Chile was Australia’s major trading partner. Australia signed a free trade agreement with Chile in 2008, further strengthening the bonds between our two countries. Many wonderful Chileans came to Australia seeking refuge from the brutal military regime of General Augusto Pinochet. There are some 23,000 Chilean-born Australians who made their lives in Australia, and they are here to stay. They and their Australian-born children form a substantial Chilean-Australian community, and many of them live in the south-east of Melbourne, where my electorate is located.

In recent years, Chile has developed rapidly. Until the global financial crisis hit in 2008, the Chilean economy was growing strongly. I hope that this disaster, which has caused damage measured in the many billions of dollars, is a setback from which Chile can recover quickly and return to that path of growth. I have great faith that, with the assistance of nations like ours, the Chilean government and the new President, Sebastian Pinera, will rebuild the devastated areas and display the strength that the country needs at this time. I was very pleased to
hear the immediate initial response from our government, announced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, of $4 million in reconstruction assistance and $1 million in emergency assistance, which included the provision of tents, generators, stretcher beds and blankets. I also acknowledge the hard work that the Ambassador for Chile in Australia, Jose Luis Balmaceda, and the new Consul-General for Chile in Victoria, Diego Velasco-von Pilgrimm, are doing to keep the Chilean community in Australia up to date with the latest situation and to raise funds for the care of those affected in Chile as well as for the reconstruction effort.

I would also like to thank the Australian Ambassador in Chile, Virginia Greville, and the embassy staff for working around the clock to locate and contact Australians in Chile in the aftermath of the earthquake—according to the embassy, at the time of the earthquake there were thought to be some 400 Australians in Chile but it is likely that there would have been many more backpackers because, in recent years, Chile has become a very popular destination for young Australians travelling through South America. I can assure the ambassador Virginia Greville that for families like mine who have a loved one in Chile the work of the embassy is very much appreciated indeed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I thank the honourable member for Isaacs and I am sure that all honourable members would associate themselves with the sympathy and condolences expressed by him in this adjournment debate.

Swan Electorate: Bali Memorial

Mr IRONS (Swan) (11.46 am)—I rise to speak today about a meeting I had this week with the Governor of Bali, Governor Pastika, and also Lindsay Ross of the Bali Peace Park Association. The purpose of the meeting was to update Governor Pastika on the association’s activities and to thank him for his previous assistance and to seek further help from him.

The Bali Peace Park Association is a Western Australian group whose members are made up of survivors, families and supporters of the 2002 Bali bombings. The bombings, which took the lives of 202 people, including 88 Australians and 39 Indonesians, affected my home state of Western Australia in particular. Western Australians visit Bali in large numbers and it was therefore not surprising that the largest number of those killed or injured during the attacks were WA residents.

The attacks have left their mark on many members of the WA community. That is why the Bali Peace Park Association and its goals are so important. The central goal is to establish a memorial park on the land where the bombings took place, providing a physical place for reflection and encouragement for the families to remember the dead. The association was incorporated on 2 September and is an established not-for-profit organisation. Members might recall that I spoke in October last year in support of the Bali Peace Park Association’s effort to seek a special application for deductible gift recipient status. I am pleased now to say that that has been granted.

The group has now turned its attention towards negotiating the purchase of the former Sari Club site in Kuta where they want the peace park to be established. Official negotiations began on 25 February. The garden will look to build a future without fear by promoting tolerance, understanding and freedom for generations to come irrespective of nationality, culture, religious belief or race. I support the work and the mission that this organisation is committed to delivering in honour of those killed in the attacks. The purpose of the meeting I hosted on
Tuesday was to discuss those ongoing negotiations with the governor. Lindsay Ross did an excellent job in representing the Bali Peace Park Association. I am pleased to be able to say that Governor Pastika was supportive of the project and even said that he would make a representation on behalf of the group to President Yudhoyono. I am sure the governor understands the significance the site will have to Australians and Indonesians and the role it will play in strengthening the relationship between our two countries.

Last year was the seventh anniversary of the bombings. Last year, on the date of the anniversary, I stood beside state Liberal Party parliamentary colleagues including the Premier of Western Australia Colin Barnett, the families, the friends, the survivors and supporters who were affected by the terrorist attacks on 12 October 2002 and also those affected by the bombings in 2005. As I stated last year, this annual gathering takes place on the anniversary at the specifically designed Bali memorial in Kings Park. Out of this tragedy the relationship between Australia and Indonesia has been strengthened. I would once again like to take the opportunity to acknowledge those who have taken part on the committee of the association. Phil Britten, the association’s spokesperson is one of the many injured in the bombings and suffered third-degree burns to about 60 per cent of his body. He also sadly lost many of his close friends in the attack. Gary Nash, vice chairman of the association suffered burns to 51 per cent of his body as well as suffering shrapnel wounds that will see him having to wear pressure garments on his legs for the rest of his life. His partner Sharon Kermac is also on the committee as treasurer.

I would also like to acknowledge one of the patrons of the Bali Peace Park Association, Dr Fiona Wood. Dr Wood is known as a burns specialist and heads up the Royal Perth Hospital Burns Unit and the Western Australian burns service. Fiona Wood was Australian of the Year in 2005. Dr Wood worked with many of the injured during the Bali bombings, leading a courageous and committed team. I recently visited the Burns Unit at RPH with the House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee. They have fabulous staff and do wonderful work.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging that both President Yudhoyono and Governor Pastika have both had children attend Curtin University of Technology, which is in my electorate of Swan. It is a great credit to our local university that world leaders choose our local university for their children, and I understand from the university they both did very well. It is positive for the future of Western Australia’s relationship with the Republic of Indonesia. In finishing, I would like to give to Governor Pastika the same message that Tony Abbott gave to President Yudhoyono yesterday: we have been with you when you needed us and we are confident that you will be with us when we need you.

Infrastructure

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (11.51 am)—Australians generally still regard themselves as living in the lucky country. We have plenty of open space; a clean, fresh environment; plenty of opportunity; and an entrepreneurial spirit, which means we can always punch well above our weight. Most of this cultural characteristic comes from our colonial penal past and also a strong vibrant attitude on the back of immigrant workers that built this country and came here to make a new life in the land of opportunity.

Certainly where we are today did not come from planning or vision. The past rarely gives you a good insight into the future, and nothing could be more true in terms of our urban planning and population growth. For a country of so few people and so great a landmass, we have
never really got the population/lifestyle/cities and towns mix quite right. It all just happened by accident or necessity. The reality is that we have only had a couple of hundred years to work this out, unlike other parts of the world, like Europe, that have been at it for thousands of years. This is both good and bad, but should be a case for us to rethink where we are today and where we want to be in the future.

Speaking in broad terms, our cities are choked, our population centres are wrong and our job centres just simply do not work. As a result, our lifestyles and standard of living suffers. If you do not believe me, just ask the millions of people stuck in traffic every day trying to get to work, those that are locked out of home ownership because of overpriced city centres, and those unable to get decent health or education services within a reasonable distance from where they live or the sorts of lifestyle opportunities that most of us expect as being normal.

The central problem here is that there is no one agency, there is no department or government or anyone who really is responsible for a complex mix of economic, social and infrastructure issues at hand. But I believe there is some light at the end of the overcrowded tunnel with the release of the Australian government report from Infrastructure Australia, *State of Australian cities 2010*. This government is paying much more attention to these problems and, importantly, focusing on how the solutions may look. Part of the solution, of course, is a complex mix of relationships between the three levels of government, the private sector and planning agencies that can alter the way that cities, regions and people develop into the future. It is not necessary to undo the mistakes of the past, but I think it is essential to plan for the future. This planning needs to interact between areas such as education and health, transport systems and food production. These all play an integral role. It is time we had a strong future-looking vision that is based on a strategic plan and which cuts across local government borders and state boundaries. It really is something for all Australians to be concerned about.

Why is this important? If we get this mix right not only will it provide for a healthier, better educated population with a higher standard of living but it will also reduce the pressure that we all face. You only need to turn to the *Intergenerational report* to look our ageing population and some of the bigger challenges we have got to the year 2050. This message, I believe, is getting through to commentators and representative bodies in this area—and certainly in the findings of the Infrastructure Australia Major Cities Unit report. This report should be essential reading for anyone who has even a passing interest in how we live, where we live and the standard of life in Australia. As the report says, Australia is one of the most urbanised nations on the planet, with 75 per cent—three-quarters—of everyone in Australia living in just 17 major cities of 100,000 people or more. But I think even more startling about this statistic is that the majority actually live just in five cities. Most of our people live in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Perth. This is a result of nonplanning rather than poor planning.

The task at hand is for us to decide what we want Australia to look like in 2050. There are plenty of reports and projections that give us a clear idea of the challenge ahead and I believe you need to look no further than two great reports: one, the Infrastructure Australia report on the state of our cities and the other, the Intergenerational Report with its stark warnings on our population makeup. There is a way forward and I believe that in part it is the commitment of this government to once again get involved in the area of urban growth and development, infrastructure development—how our cities will look into the future. I think it is an important area and one that we should tackle with resources as well strategic thought.

MAIN COMMITTEE
The challenge for us is to partner with the states, territories and local government. We cannot do it without them. We need to find consistent, sustainable policies to take us through the next 40 years and ensure the standard of living that we cherish so much—all the opportunities that we have—are shared and that they do not slip away and are not diminished over time just because of a lack of will or planning.

**Lymphoedema**

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (11.56 am)—I rise today to speak on the important topics of lymphoedema and funding for lymphoedema in Australia. I want to pay tribute to the Castle Hill Country Women’s Association, who raised this vital issue in two motions in their community group at a recent meeting. The first motion read:

That the CWA of NSW urges the state and federal governments to establish treatment centres for lymphoedema, with a central register of approved clinicians.

And the second motion read:

That the CWA of NSW urges the state and federal governments to cover the cost of prescribed compression garments necessary in the effective treatment of lymphoedema.

This comes on the eve of the 2010 Australasian Lymphology Association conference, which is being held at the Sebel Albert Park in Melbourne from 27 to 29 May. The theme for this year is ‘Reflections of the Past, Inspirations for the Future’.

Lymphoedema is the term given to swelling as a result of malfunction of the lymphatic system. It can be congenital—primary lymphoedema—or secondary lymphoedema, which results from damage to the system, such as trauma, but it more often results from surgery for cancer or melanoma. In recent times it has become more common. With an increase in the number of obese people or of people with weight-related problems, there is evidence of increasing numbers of diagnoses of lymphoedema.

One of the important features of the motions that the Castle Hill Country Women’s Association has passed is that they have some therapists and people involved in the treatment of this area who have some very direct suggestions that can help government with their funding. I note that the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, when he was the health minister in the previous government was one of those who recognised this challenge and provided funding of half a million dollars to the National Breast Cancer Centre for initiatives to help patients affected by lymphoedema after treatment. In a press release dated 15 April 2007 he noted that the Australian government was providing this half a million dollars because:

At present, there are no lymphoedema guides in Australia for either the public or health professionals.

That is one of the consistent themes that I hear in relation to this topic: that there needs to be an improvement in the awareness of this issue generally and, indeed, the attention given to it. So the Leader of the Opposition, as then Minister for Health certainly saw ahead on this particularly important issue.

The Castle Hill Country Women’s Association is concerned about two issues associated with lymphoedema. The first is the cost of the garments used in the ongoing management of people suffering from lymphoedema. The second is the need for designated, trained therapists and, potentially, what they term as dedicated lymphoedema treatment areas in our hospital system. This is of quite serious concern considering that there could be an extra 38,000 people
being diagnosed with cancer each year, of whom at least 8,000 are expected to develop lymphoedema.

As to the cost of treating this condition, the garments that individuals are required to wear need to be made to measure—they cannot be factory made or simply one-size-fits-all. For example it was put to me that one made-to-measure garment with two full legs would cost $712. That could be very significant for people already in difficult circumstances. The cost of treatment is not as great as that for other things, but it is a significant impediment to a person’s ongoing healthcare management and there is little or no attention paid to this serious consideration.

There is also a push—which I support, and which is part of the motions put forward by the Castle Hill Country Women’s Association—for lymphoedema to be regarded as an illness in its own right and managed as such, and I accept that that is something that should be looked at seriously. The suggestion that there be dedicated treatment areas within our hospitals has a lot of merit as well. I think if we are seeking to make improvements to the management of ongoing issues related to cancer treatment, then this is an area that could well benefit from attention from state and federal governments.

A great deal of money has been allocated to researching this illness but, from the advice that has been provided to me, the best-practice guidelines that have resulted from the research are not being followed. I think it is important that treatment centres are established, or looked at by government as an option, for early diagnosis and therapeutic management of this condition. I want to record my thanks to the Castle Hill Country Women’s Association for these wonderful motions and to record my support for lymphoedema being diagnosed as an illness.

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (12.01 pm)—I rise today to speak about good news for Cairns and the Far North Queensland region. Next week, construction will start on the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College. There have been over five years of hard work by local marine businesses and the education community to see this come to fruition. It has been a partnership between not only the business community and the education sector in Cairns but also the federal and state governments. It is going to be critically important to the long-term security of and support for the marine industry locally, but also it will help to diversify and strengthen our local economy. Cairns is a great place to come and get an education, whether from our James Cook University, our local TAFE or the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre, and now we are going to have a world class marine skills training centre—the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College. It is an $8 million investment, and the federal government has committed $2 million towards it through our trades training program.

There is no reason why Cairns cannot establish itself as a marine training hub, not only locally but also nationally and internationally—we are well-positioned in the Asia-Pacific region. In Cairns we have been going through some particularly difficult economic times with unemployment now in double digits, and this type of diversification will provide a real opportunity. It will also provide a boost and a shot in the arm in terms of confidence for the local community to see construction start next week.

A significant amount of sea traffic goes through the Gulf of Carpentaria, the Torres Strait and the Great Barrier Reef, and Cairns has a highly diversified marine sector that includes
commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, Merchant Navy, Customs and Navy, and an expanding white boat industry—the superyacht industry. There is a desperate need for specialised training facilities to service these industries. That is why industry has been working locally for more than five years to secure sufficient funding to build this college.

With its close proximity to the Asia-Pacific region and an international airport, and located in the lovely warm waters next to the Great Barrier Reef, Cairns is extremely well placed to build on these local industries and to service national and international areas. I think Cairns is a much nicer place than Launceston to come to to get a marine ticket, and that is something that we will certainly be marketing. They do a fantastic job down in Launceston, but it will be great to see Australia build another internationally recognised marine centre in Cairns.

The Rudd government have been supporting this initiative. We have also moved, since I have been elected, to support industries like the superyacht industry. This is an industry that has been expanding in Australia and contributes about $50 million to the economy in Cairns and $150 million to the nation’s economy. Similarly, the state government is investing in an upgrade of the development of the cruise shipping terminal. All of these areas require skilled staff. A training framework will enable people to come to Cairns—from places local, national and international—and receive training which will be a pathway into these careers. The superyacht industry was looking for reforms in terms of a visa that would enable more superyachts to come to Australia, and I am very pleased that we were able to secure that for them in the lead-up to the last election, and I want to thank Minister Evans for delivering that on time. I know it has already driven benefits in that it has allowed new superyachts to come to Cairns, and there will be further benefit to local industry.

These commitments have come about through a good partnership between the community, business and state and federal governments. I want to particularly pay tribute to the chairman of the organisation, Allan Wallish, and the project manager, Kim Andersen. They have been critically important in driving this project along. Other critically important people have been Tony Fuller, the principal of Woree State High School; Joann Pyne from Tropical North Queensland TAFE; Sheridan van Asch from the Department of Education and Training; Ian McKirdy from the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation; John Downs from TNQ Institute of Tertiary and Further Education; and Chris Boland from FNQ Ports Corporation. I know Alan Vico and Mike Colleton, also from FNQ Ports Corporation, have played an important role in bringing this project to fruition.

It is a great project. It is going to be a real shot in the arm for the local community. Construction starts next week. We are all really looking forward to it, and I know that it is going to provide pathways for local people into the marine area not only in the traditional areas of fishing or tourism, but also in the Merchant Navy and other areas. It is fantastic and I would like to again congratulate those people for the work they have done to bring it to fruition.

Solar Energy

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (12.06 pm)—I want to enlarge on a statement I made in the parliament on my first day back this week. On 19 August, as part of a question on ceiling batt insulation, I tabled papers outlining 14 rorts and doubtful practices as conveyed to me freely by the office manager of AllSafe, Tai Cullum—a reputable franchisee installer in Bundaberg. On 16 September, three days after I left for duties in New York, the then Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts, knowing that I could not respond until well into this new year,
in a very cowardly fashion tabled a letter from David Jordan, the franchisor of AllSafe—a letter that the minister had been sitting on for 3½ weeks, accusing me of misrepresenting the comments from AllSafe’s Bundaberg franchisee. It also accused me of ‘incorrect statements’, ‘political point-scoring’ and having hurt the stimulus factor of this package. But nowhere did the minister or his correspondent detail where I was incorrect or where I had misled.

These 14 items included things such as non-provision of quotes prior to fitting, forging of signatures, overstating of square metres in a roof, not insulating the whole roof of a house, poor insulation material and misrepresenting that they were from the government. Tai Cullum sent that letter to me, and, as I said, I tabled it in the House. Mr Jordan, in his letter to the minister, accused my staffer and my media officer, Kate Barwick, of getting this information under the ‘guise’ of seeking advice. That is not correct. She was clear, straightforward and direct, as she always is, in discussions with the company’s office manager and fully informed him that the information that she sought would be used in parliament. Indeed, I spoke to him as well and I found him a very polite and focused young man.

And there was nothing unusual in what we were doing, because the very same firm franchisee, on 13 August in the Bundaberg News Mail, had made similar warnings. The minister, instead of attacking me, should have taken these 14 points on board because they have proved to be not only accurate but also prophetic. And not only have they happened in Bundaberg and in the Wide Bay Burnett area of Bundaberg, they have happened all over Australia, to the point where the government has admitted it, the outgoing minister admitted it, the new minister yesterday in his statement admitted it and the department has admitted it—to the point where the minister is now going to refer matters to the Australian Federal Police and the Auditor-General.

The point I am making is this. In August last year, if the government had gone in and taken on the shoddies in the industry, there and then, instead of denigrating me—and I was the first one to raise these matters in a serious way—we possibly would not have had a number of these deaths, fires and dreadful things that have occurred since. It is ironic that the good firms, the reputable installers, would still be in business and doing good business. What do they have now? Because the whole system has been corrupted, these good installers, and I certainly include AllSafe, are now in a situation where they cannot operate properly.

In his letter to the minister, Mr Jordan said that they employed 12 people in Bundaberg, but I have an article from the Bundaberg News-Mail which says that since the minister closed the scheme down they are 14 employees down—so they have actually dropped two. Not only that, we have warehouses full of material, some good and some bad, all over this country. All I would say to the outgoing minister is: you treated me badly, you did not take my advice and we have suffered a woeful consequence because of it. (Time expired)

International Women’s Day

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (12.11 pm)—Today I rise to speak on our recent celebrations of International Women’s Day and I want to take the opportunity to commend some of the local women in my electorate of Calwell. I want to commend them for their achievements, their hard work and their sacrifices which, as we know, all too often remain unacknowledged.

In my electorate of Calwell our women hail from a range of ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, yet we have found that with this diversity comes a sense of collective unity as
we all cope with the challenges we encounter in our roles as women, mothers and activists. In my electorate there are hundreds of women that I have come across in the time that I have been the member for Calwell, all of them deserving acknowledgement. In fact, it has been their support and their encouragement that has helped me get through my job as a female member of parliament and as a parent. I often reassess my own frustrations when I look at what most of these women have been through, and I draw a lot of confidence from their accomplishments and their strengths.

Today I want to pay tribute to four women who are stalwarts of their community and whose activism and volunteerism have transformed the lives of the people around them. They are women who have families but who have always found the time to give to their community. I would like to begin by mentioning here today long-term Broadmeadows resident and mother of four children, Ms Terri McNaughton. For most of her working life Terri worked for the then Telecom, where she was a shop steward for her union and spent most of her time advocating for the rights and conditions of the people she worked with. Terri has maintained a lifelong interest in the rights of working people.

Terri has an interesting and poignant story. Growing up in the hard years of the depression and one of eight children abandoned by their father, Terri and her siblings were taken from their mother—who was deemed not able to look after them—and brought up in a convent by Catholic nuns for a number of years in which she was separated from most of her siblings. Terri’s mother, however, fought hard to be reunited with her children. Part of this fight involved writing to the great Australian politician Arthur Calwell, pleading for him to give her a house in order to house her children. Arthur Calwell responded to her pleas and found her a house, and thus the family was able to be reunited.

In 2003 Terri, my very good friend and supporter, was given the opportunity to publicly thank Mary Elizabeth Calwell, the daughter of Arthur Calwell, on behalf of her mother and siblings for his intervention all those years ago that allowed the family to be reunited. Terri had a difficult childhood and a difficult life but dedicated her own life in activism to helping disadvantaged people, especially children and women. She has set up a very small but very effective support group for abused children and women and continues to be involved in issues which effect her community.

I want to also acknowledge Mrs Thekla Scarcella. Thekla is a woman of many talents who migrated to Australia at 20 years of age in 1967. She created a family and pursued her great passion for writing. Thekla has been involved in many organisations. She has written, directed and taught over many years. She continues her good work by raising funds for breast cancer and for the children’s hospital and has been a teacher of Modern Greek. In fact, she set up a school in Shepparton many years ago. She teaches her senior citizens groups anything from computer skills to healthy living skills. She is forever active and constantly giving. She transforms the lives of the people in her community. Thekla has received many awards recognising her services, including the Premier’s Multicultural Award for services to her community.

I want to also mention Sonja Rutherford, an icon in the Broadmeadows community. Together with her husband John, she established the Broadmeadows Progress Association over 30 years ago. This association has been at the forefront of lobbying on behalf of the community on issues from stopping the fast train link to the airport, when I first became the member in 2001, to supporting the Coolaroo station for many years. Finally, thanks to the Brumby
state government, that has now been built. Sonja has also strongly lobbied for the Broadmeadows town hall to be saved from becoming a poker machines venue of the North Melbourne Football Club. She has been involved in countless campaigns. She also has time to run the Broadmeadows Community Singing Group. Sonja is a champion weightlifter in the over 60s category. She has travelled abroad, representing Australia, and is a national champion. This is a multifaceted woman who continues to serve with a passion and energy that has no rival.

Finally, Ayse Koksyz, a long-time resident of Meadow Heights, established the Turkish Women’s Group and has dedicated her time to giving women from the Turkish-speaking community opportunities to meet and socialise when otherwise they would be isolated and unable to connect with the broader community. Her group has a vibrancy and colour that is a joy to be a part of. They conduct festivals and showcase the magnificent Turkish handicrafts that are made by local women. They run wonderful festivals with lots of wonderful Turkish food and music, and I love every minute of my attendance. (Time expired)

Home Insulation Program

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (12.17 pm)—A lot has been said about the insulation industry in recent times. It has been brought into the spotlight in a negative way as a result of the government’s attempt to shovel as much money out the door as possible. The result has been an absolute fiasco. There has been fraud. There has been damage to property. There have been deaths. The failure of the system has been monumental, and it will go down in history as a comprehensive failure of this Rudd government.

Leaving that aside, my intention today is to speak of what this failed program has done to a local business in Cowan, Mr Insulation; its owner, Martin Perry; his family; and the dismissed staff. I would like to say at the outset that, having spoken to Mr Perry and visited his business in Landsdale, I have a far greater appreciation of the insulation industry and a high regard for this insulation business, which has been around for more than 20 years.

Mr Perry produces his own cellulose blow-in insulation. For those who do not know of it, it is shredded newspaper that has borax and boric acid flame retardants mixed into it. Mr Perry produces this cellulose insulation in accordance with Australian standards. It will not burn. He demonstrated this by holding a handful of the cellulose and trying to burn it with a propane torch. It went red from the heat and then black, but it did not burn. He similarly showed me the classic fibreglass batts and polyester insulation, lighting a petrol fire and then placing these forms of insulation over it. Again, they did not burn. Mr Perry attributes the fires not to burning insulation but to poor and inexperienced installations.

Apart from the problems with the infamous foil insulation, Mr Perry told me that the major problem has been downlights installed in older houses where no guards were placed around the lights, which are exposed in the roofs. Particularly in homes surrounded by trees, years of combustible leaf litter can accumulate. If the downlights do not have guards around them, that litter can fall onto the top of the downlights and catch fire when it gets hot enough. Even a small fire can then cause the leaf litter through the rest of the roof to also catch fire, creating a roof fire. What makes this more likely is when inexperienced insulation installers do not clean out the roof cavity first but instead push the batts into the roof space, pushing the leaf litter along and into the low points on the ceiling—the downlights. Mr Perry’s point is that the fire
risk in older houses with unguarded downlights installed before two years ago are at great risk if insulation is put in without a clean-up of the combustible materials in the roof space.

I, like many members, have been contacted by those local residents who, having participated in that program, are concerned about the reported dangers of insulation installation. The concerns of the public have been fuelled by the reports of fires and deaths and by the cancellation of the scheme. This has resulted in an immediate halt to new orders. For Mr Perry, the owner of Mr Insulation, $300,000 worth of forward bookings have been cancelled. His $80,000 worth of insulation batts in stock are almost worthless. In reality the only part of the business left is new home insulation and, given the stock sitting around, prices for that work are likely to plummet.

Five days before the program ceased Mr Perry paid $4,500 to put staff through a training course. They were staff that have since been predominantly let go. Mr Perry is still owed around $5,500 from the program and I hope that those funds will be forthcoming in the immediate future. If you include prepaid commissions—amounting to $18,000—to some former sales staff, it is estimated that $40,000 has been lost as a result of the program’s closure. I should also say that Mr Insulation was around a long time before the program; it was not one of these businesses that sprung up to take advantage of the scheme and in some cases the loopholes and weaknesses in the scheme. Before the program Mr Perry’s business would insulate between three and five homes per day; last week they had one job for the whole week.

Because of the way it was set up this program invited fraud, shoddy work and major risks. The minister and the government got more than enough warnings yet the program comprehensively failed, with grave results. From visiting Mr Insulation I understand how a legitimate and creditable industry has been brought to its knees because the government did not put the work into making sure this program had the safeguards in place but preferred to shovel the cash out the door.

I think it is important for all participants in this program to assess the risks and seek inspection of their homes if they think they are at risk. There was a time when Australians had confidence in the insulation industry—and they were right to have confidence, if Mr Insulation is typical of the businesses that existed before the program. Now Australians are lacking in confidence because of the government’s mismanagement of the Home Insulation Program. The blame for this lies directly at the feet of the government, whose reckless haste in spending resulted in failures in set-up, administration and governance. We are still waiting die details on how the government will help businesses like Mr Insulation that have suffered as a result of this program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before calling the honourable member for Melbourne Ports I would like to congratulate the honourable member for Barker on his appointment as Government Whip.

Mr Secker—That would be nice, Deputy Speaker, but I advise that my appointment was as Opposition Whip!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—A Freudian slip on my part. I do apologise to the Main Committee.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (12.23 pm)—I want to return to an area of interest of mine since I have been on the Joint Committee on Electoral Matters, since being elected to this place. Recently—within the last day, in fact—legislation was passed in the House of Representatives, which is going to go before the Senate, on the early closure of the rolls and provisional voting. I want to remind this place that at least 50,000 people we know of, on the basis of past experience, would have enrolled during the traditional seven-day period of grace after the calling of the last election, but they were prevented from doing so at the last election because of the early closure of the roll. Many more were disenfranchised by being taken off the roll by the AEC when they changed their address and were deterred from re-enrolling by the more onerous enrolment and identification requirements.

Let me remind the House again of the context in which these changes were made at the last federal election. Emeritus Professor Colin Hughes, the highly respected former Electoral Commissioner, and Brian Costar wrote in 2005 that there was a:

... thorough review of the electoral roll conducted in 2002 by the Australian National Audit Office, which concluded “that, overall, the Australian electoral roll is one of high integrity, and can be relied on for electoral purposes”. There are adequate safeguards in the current electoral laws and procedures to deal with any future attempts at fraud without stripping the vote from hundreds of thousands of citizens.

The inquiry by the Joint Committee on Electoral Matters into the 2007 election received a submission from the Australian Electoral Commission, the impartial organisation that runs Australia’s elections to our great credit. In fact, its model is used by agencies all over the world for the running of other elections. The AEC submission said:

... it can be clearly stated, in relation to false identities, that there has never been any evidence of widespread or organised enrolment fraud in Australia.

It is very interesting to review the various claims that have been made about this. I think the member for Banks dealt with this in his remarks on the recent bill. I urge senators to understand what happens.

Sometimes in seats there is evidence of multiple voting. The highly professional people in the Australian Electoral Commission go into it and examine why names appear on certain occasions. In table 2.3 on page 18 of the Australian Electoral Commission’s report, the following really relevant piece of information appears. This was pointed out by the member for Banks. In admissions by age category, 98 per cent of people involved in multiple voting were 70 and over. Of the 64 cases referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions, 25 were subsequently investigated by the AFP and no cases were referred back to the DPP. The small evidence that there is of so-called electoral fraud is mainly committed by people in our electorates who are in nursing homes. They might vote in mobile booths and then, confused and perhaps forgetful, vote on election day or perhaps in some other prepolling arrangement because they have forgotten that they have voted. There is no evidence of widespread electoral fraud in Australia.

Let me turn to the effect of the change in the photographic proof of identity requirement if you show up and claim a provisional vote but are not registered on the roll. You show up, according to the member for Banks, and have to produce a drivers licence. If you do not have it, you get a provisional vote. If you do not produce your licence within so many days, your vote will not count. That provision alone has resulted in a massive increase in the number of votes...
rejected. In 2004, there were 89,841 votes rejected. In 2007, there were 143,470 votes rejected. That is over 40,000 more votes rejected. The traditional way we dealt with this—and under which the current opposition won many elections where there were no accusations of fraud—when people who had moved within their electorate turned up for a provisional vote was that the Electoral Commissioner took down their provisional vote and took a copy of their signature. Then they went back to the Electoral Commission some days later to see whether they were included in the roll. If they were not then they were excluded. (Time expired)

Paterson Electorate: Ambulance Crews

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (12.27 pm)—I rise today as a concerned member of my local community who may one day have to rely on an ambulance and the expertise of those on board. The New South Wales Labor government has a plan to use volunteer ambulance drivers in Stroud, Gloucester and Bulahdelah, which all fall within my electorate of Paterson. This is extremely concerning. It is a thoughtless, penny-pinching way of trying to make up for the fact that neither our state nor our federal Labor governments have provided enough funding to train adequate numbers for the ambulance corps. I must make it very clear that volunteers are the absolute backbone of our society. They do tireless work, not only without pay but often without thanks or recognition. I sincerely thank them. However, responding to a stressful and often life-threatening medical situation of this magnitude is not a job for volunteers. This is a responsibility that should only be given to the most highly trained, professional paramedics working in teams of two so that lives can saved.

Allow me to give some background on the training of our paramedics. Firstly, there are qualified paramedics. These people have done at least three years of intensive training, including four written exams and 10 months probation on the road. They then move on to be a paramedic intern. This involves another two years of practice, mentoring and more intensive training. They would have many skills, including CPR and haemorrhage control, and an intimate knowledge of the many different drugs. They have to requalify every 18 months. Finally, there are intensive care paramedics, who deal with even more serious cases, including cardiac care. An ICP can administer 27 specialist medications to both adults and children. Clearly, these are people who are highly trained to deal with emergency situations and to give patients quick, accurate and vital medical care. They have years of intense training and in many cases decades of experience on the road. These are people who should not be replaced by volunteers, should not be responsible for volunteers and should be supported and protected by a professional colleague in a two-person crew.

These two-person crews are vitally important so that each and every life-saving treatment can be delivered. If volunteers are used, this simply cannot happen. For example, in the outer Hunter, paramedics are authorised to give two specialised medications to someone having a heart attack. But, according to protocol, this medication cannot be used unless two paramedics agree that the patient meets the criteria. So, if there is only one trained paramedic on the scene, the patient just has to go without. This could be the difference between a life saved and a life lost.

Another important consideration for paramedics in my electorate is the roads through Gloucester, Stroud and Bulahdelah, which are dangerous black spots. This means that the likelihood of a motor vehicle accident needing an ambulance is a very real possibility. Under
Labor’s plans, volunteers would have to be phoned up at all hours of the night and drive these same roads to get to the ambulance station. Are we seriously supposed to believe this is a workable and safe idea? I note these measures have only been suggested for regional towns, and so I ask our Labor governments: why should those of us in regional areas have to put up with substandard ambulance services? Are our lives and our safety of less value than those in the city?

I have started a petition to stop this reckless proposal, and I have strong support. Already there are over 200 members of my Facebook cause page against this idea. It is my job to take action on behalf of concerned constituents. It is also important that I take action because local Health Services Union organiser, Jim Arneman, has failed to bring about a solution to this problem, despite his position in the union and the Labor Party. Mr Arneman has been quick to speak on this issue, but his action has been extremely lacking. In the media this week Mr Arneman blames the New South Wales ambulance service for this plan, even though it is our state Labor government which has failed to invest enough money to train adequate paramedics. Some local ambulance drivers have even told me they left the HSU because they were not being properly represented. A new body, the Emergency Medical Service Protection Association, has now been established and has more than 700 members.

While volunteers are absolutely vital in keeping our society running smoothly, they do not have a place as ambulance drivers. The New South Wales and Australian Labor governments need to take action now to ensure that enough paramedics are trained for two-person crews right across New South Wales—regional and city areas alike—as patients such as those in Paterson deserve the best care possible, and that means fully trained, properly qualified ambulance crews, not crews manned by volunteers.

Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program

Ms KING (Ballarat) (12.32 pm)—I am pleased to stand here today and recognise the important changes brought about across my electorate over the past 12 months through the government’s Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. The program is part of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan and in round 1 it has seen more than $1 billion invested in communities across Australia since it was introduced in November 2008. The program was designed to stimulate local economies and support employment by building community projects. By providing funding, the government empowers local councils and shires to identify infrastructure projects that most benefit local communities. In my electorate, for example, nearly 40 projects received funding totalling $9,780,000 last year. These ranged in size from $5 million to upgrade facilities and amenities at the Eureka interpretive centre and $2.24 million for the construction of a multipurpose community recreation centre in Creswick, to a smaller and wonderfully diverse range of grassroots projects.

Across the Ballarat electorate we have seen footpath extensions and installations, drinking fountains installed in playgrounds, new playground equipment, resurfacing of cricket pitches, improvements to public pools and sporting facilities, improvements to public irrigation systems, and even the laying of a walking track in the township of Korweinguboo. While many of these small projects fly under the radar of media and wide public attention, we should not underestimate the power of even the smallest infrastructure improvements to have a profound effect on local communities.

Mr Hunt—Pink batts!
Ms KING—I can tell you who is bats! Only last week I was out celebrating the installation of new public barbecue facilities with residents in the small town of Elaine, towards the southern boundary of my electorate. On a cool and windy day we sheltered under a pergola and shared cups of tea and cake. The residents told me that the barbecue had become almost a de facto town centre, a place for locals to meet, get together, cook a chop or a sausage and share news and friendship. They were also hopeful it might encourage travellers between Ballarat and Geelong to pull over and take time out from the road at Elaine. At $9½ thousand dollars, which also included resurfacing the reserve car park, it was one of the smallest RLCIP projects in my electorate last year, but it has made a significant difference to this vibrant community.

In the town of Ballan $56,000 was invested in refurbishing the outdoor pool. This included works to the change rooms, upgrading first aid amenities and plant controls. Again, the work was probably long overdue and it has made a real difference to the lives of Ballan locals over the summer. In Trentham, another small town in my electorate which has an increasingly vibrant tourism scene, $30,000 was invested in improving the public toilets. This included installation of water tanks, diversion of stormwater and other water-saving devices. In Bacchus Marsh the tennis courts at Maddingley Park have had lighting installed to extend their use at night.

I congratulate the three local councils in my electorate that have both recommended these projects and worked so hard to complete them within the allocated time frames. I am certainly proud of the way the City of Ballarat, the shires of Moorabool and Hepburn and also Golden Plains shire, a small part of which is in my electorate, have administered these projects. The federal government has pushed these councils hard and they have responded quite magnificently. The program has been a magnificent example of the federal government working in partnership with local governments to provide tangible on-the-ground benefits to communities.

I also note the program’s success in creating and sustaining jobs throughout the global financial crisis. Dozens of small businesses, tradies, building supply companies, local landscapers, plumbers, electricians and others across my electorate have all put up their hands for this work. I congratulate them on the quality of their involvement.

Last week I was back in Trentham, this time inspecting change rooms at the rec reserve. It was another cold, very wet and windy day and it was gusting through the broken windows. I just imagined what it was like for those local sportspeople to use those facilities. We were able to announce that the Trentham change rooms would be one of the first facilities to benefit out of the further 19 ready-to-go projects of $1.1 million across the electorate of Ballarat. That they convinced Hepburn shire their RLCIP project should be the first cab off the rank is an enormous testament to the way the Trentham Football Club and the recreation reserve put forward that project. It has been a very good program for local councils and I certainly commend it to this chamber.

Flinders Electorate: Gunnamatta Outfall

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (12.37 pm)—I want to speak in relation to the Gunnamatta outfall in my electorate. This is an outfall which sees 150 billion litres of partially treated sewage dumped off the coast every year. Four hundred million litres of partially treated sewage is dumped off the coast at one of Australia’s great surf beaches every day. Seventeen million
litres of partially treated sewage on average is dumped every hour, every day, every year. What we see here are two things, the first of which is a vile pollution of our coasts. In the 21st century we are using a 19th century approach which pollutes our coasts, wastes water and dumps it off the coast. That is unacceptable. Secondly, this is a monumental waste of a valuable resource, water, which could be recycled for industry and agriculture.

Against that background I am delighted to say that the Victorian EPA has finally given the go-ahead for an upgrade to the Eastern Treatment Plant. That is a fantastic result for the Mornington Peninsula which should see class A water discharged at Gunnamatta within the next 18 months. That is part 1 of the two-part process, the first part of which is to clean up this water to make sure that the coast is dramatically improved. That is a great step forward. It is a huge victory for the Clean Ocean Foundation. It is what as a peninsula, as a community, as a group of people, we have argued for. I congratulate the surfing associations, the Clean Ocean Foundation, the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and the general community of the Mornington Peninsula. They have all worked towards this moment. Gunnamatta is on its way to being cleaned up.

The next step, however, is very simple. There must be uses found so that this water is not wasted and discharged off the coast—so that this water, which will be cleaned up, is reused for industry and agriculture. This could include recharge of the aquifers in Boneo on the southern peninsula. If we can recharge the aquifers we can work to ensure that the salt infiltration, which is currently threatening parts of the aquifer system, does not occur. If we can recharge it, that is the perfect vehicle for using that water for local industry and, in particular, local agriculture throughout the Boneo region. That is the step forward which must now occur. The first step of cleaning up the outfall is underway. I am delighted and proud to see that we as a peninsula have been successful and I pay tribute to the work of the Clean Ocean Foundation. We must now push the state to ensure that this water is recycled for industry and agriculture, to take the pressure off using our drinking water, which should not be used for those purposes where recycled water is available. We must also ensure that there is a long-term health management plan for the southern peninsula’s aquifers.

Against that background, I also want to make reference to one other group on the southern peninsula and that is the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group. Helen Howells, Chair of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group, has approached me. She has asked that I table a petition, with 117 signatories, calling for a federal human rights act. I am happy to do that. I made that pledge to Helen and I now so do. I present this petition from 117 different representatives, two-thirds of whom, I am advised, are from the Mornington Peninsula. I thank the House.

Hunter Electorate

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (12.41 pm)—Over the past 12 months or so and, in turn, over the next three years, the Hunter electorate has experienced and will experience unprecedented levels of infrastructure funding from the Commonwealth government. Just to give a few examples: $1.65 billion for the Hunter Expressway; $1.2 billion to enlarge capacity and efficiency of the Hunter coal chain; and $134 million on Building the Education Revolution and on our VET—that is, vocational education and training—facilities in the electorate. The funding also includes $3.3 million on social housing, more than $5.5 million on the regional local infrastructure program, $1.36 million for defence housing, around $140 million on expansion
and improvements to the Singleton infantry centre, and $4.56 million on the Black Spot Program. These are all critical projects for the Hunter electorate and, indeed, for the Hunter region. Let me dwell on a couple of them for a moment. The Hunter Expressway has been on the drawing board for around 20 years. It is absolutely critical to economic efficiency in the region and, of course, will bring much needed relief for motorists who spend a terrible peak hour every morning and afternoon trying to make their way from the Upper and Lower Hunter regions.

The expressway will also provide much needed bypasses for a number of communities throughout my electorate which have had to put up with heavy vehicle movements for many years. It took a Labor government to conceive and plan the idea and it took a Labor government to fund the project, after almost 12 years of stalling on the part of the former government. The coal chain is obviously important not only to my electorate but also to the region more generally. The $1.2 billion spent will allow us to move more coal to port more quickly and more efficiently by putting in an additional dedicated rail line and removing gradients along the way, which slow down trains, and also removing railway level crossings along the way. That will also promote efficiency. As we upgrade the port to a similar capacity, this will make a big difference to the coal industry and therefore to the region’s wealth.

Schools speak for themselves. As you know, every primary school not only in my electorate but in all electorates will receive new facilities, typically libraries, school halls et cetera. The regional and local infrastructure program has allowed councils to build or upgrade parks, swimming pools and amenities blocks. Members are familiar with the projects—they go on and on—and they have been a real boon to each of the local government areas in my electorate. Social housing speaks for itself as does, of course, the upgrades to the Singleton Infantry Centre, a key driver for the electorate but in particular a key driver for the Singleton Shire Council area.

Amongst the schools and education funding streams we have new science and language centres et cetera, with places like Cessnock High School, Kurri Kurri High School and St Joseph’s High School in Aberdeen receiving science and language centres. In Kurri Kurri nearly $8 million will be spent on TAFE facilities. The list goes on and on and it is great news for the electorate.

Ironically, this is fuelling additional growth in the electorate and that additional growth will call on more and more investment. One of the ironic consequences of the Hunter Expressway, for example, will be a greater need for bypasses of both Singleton and Muswellbrook as more traffic flows up the New England Highway. In Scone we have the ridiculous situation in the 21st century where coal trains go across a level crossing on the New England Highway, cutting off the town for up to eight minutes—a ridiculous situation and something which I am determined to resolve in partnership with the state government. The state government has primary responsibility for it, but I am talking to Minister Albanese about how the federal government may be able to assist in what is a critical issue for Scone; not one which just goes to convenience but one which goes to the safety and welfare of the residents of that town.

Ms Jessica Watson

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (12.46 pm)—I am particularly pleased to say that Jessica Watson has well and truly completed two-thirds of her journey around the world and is on her way home. The teenage adventurer from Buderim on the Sunshine Coast has shown immense
courage, strength and determination in pursuit of her dream to be the youngest person to sail solo around the world. She is truly an inspiration to many, and has proven to many people around the world that with determination, self-belief and preparation anything is possible.

Today, 11 March, marks the 145th day of Jessica’s journey. She has completed some 16,500 nautical miles, and has fewer than 6,000 nautical miles remaining until she arrives at her destination, Sydney. Jessica and her pink boat, *Ella’s Pink Lady*, are on the homeward stretch and due to finish their journey and arrive back in Australia in late April or May. She is currently 700 nautical miles—about 1,300 kilometres—east of the southern tip of South Africa.

On behalf of the residents of Fisher, I would like to formally congratulate Jessica for what she has set out to do, what she has done so far and for the inspiration and encouragement she is generating for all young people around Australia and the world from the message she is spreading: they should dare to dream big and achieve big.

At 16 years of age, Jessica attracted both praise and criticism before she embarked on her journey in October 2009. She also battled equipment failure and mishaps on her practice voyage, but she has proven to date that often times it is the right thing to ignore the detractors and chase your goal.

Jessica’s journey has highlighted the fact that it is important in this world that we still have people who are adventurers and innovators, and inventors and dreamers; people who will blaze new trails and attempt new things so that mankind can still discover the things that can only be discovered by taking a risk and going out on a limb. Jessica Watson should be proud that she can be classed among those valuable people.

I want to point out that Jessica has a very informative website that includes regular diary entries, videos, a map of her journey so far and a blogspot where members and residents who are following her progress are able to catch up and leave a comment. It is not uncommon for her to have up to 250 comments posted in response to her diary entries. On Monday alone—that is, 8 March—there were an amazing 982 comments. It is fascinating to read some of those blog entries and get an idea of the inspiration that Jessica is imparting to those back home in Australia and all around the world who are following her journey so closely.

Her diary entries to followers are well-written, interesting and unpretentious. They convey a real sense that she is bringing all of these regular readers along on her journey. For those who have not yet visited the website, it is great to read and I encourage you to have a look at www.jessicawatson.com.au. Jessica has shown wisdom and skill beyond her years, and I wish her every success, safety and fun on the remaining part of her journey.

I thought I might read in the time available to me an extract from today’s diary entry:

First off, a huge thanks for all the book title ideas. That was a pretty amazing response and certainly gave us plenty to think about, as well as a lot of laughs! So thanks again.

Ella’s Pink Lady hasn’t been breaking any speed records lately but we are sailing along steadily. Yesterday was pretty slow but today’s been better. The sunshine and calm seas continue, so we’re not exactly doing it too hard. But when the speedo drops below 3 knots it becomes a bit of a test of my patience. It’s not that I’m in any terrible rush, because I’m having such a good time still, it’s just that it feels so much more Purposeful to be going somewhere. The warm sunshine, amazing starry nights and lovely pink sunsets put in me in a great mood, but add speed as well and I’m one happy girl!
Another great thing about the quiet conditions is that I’ve been able to leave the front hatch open, which is doing wonders at giving the cabin a nice freshen up. It is really helping my efforts to keep the mould and damp at bay. You wouldn’t believe some of the places I’m finding little patches of mould. The damp works its way in everywhere, for example all the zips on my jeans have corroded into place which is a little annoying!

Finally, I’m relieved and pleased to be able to report that the dunny is back in action, the problem was some tiny bits of grit stuck in the pressure relief/air valve.

Jessica Watson is an inspirational young lady. She is 16 years of age and is doing something that makes her a role model for all young people in Australia. Australia needs many more young people like Jessica Watson. I applaud her, I salute her, I congratulate her and I look forward to her safe return home.

Cunningham Electorate: Overseas Students

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (12.51 pm)—I endorse the comments of the member for Fisher about the amazing efforts of Jessica Watson. I think a lot of young people are interested in following her journey and are inspired by it. I want to talk today about an event that I attended in my local area during the past non-sitting week of the parliament. The University of Wollongong has a very significant intake of international students each year. It has a great reputation, and I would be a bit biased in saying that that is, by and large, a result of the fact that we are such a wonderful part of the nation. For students coming from overseas it is a city without being a place where you can get lost, like you can in the big cities. Certainly Wollongong has proved very attractive to international students for quite a long time.

This is the third year that the university has put this function on, and I put on the record my great commendation of those at the university’s international student centre who organised this. It is called a welcome to Wollongong event for international students, and it has a twofold effect. Firstly, it makes those students and their parents or family who are there with them at the beginning of their studies feel welcome and confident that the students, who have come so far to study in Australia, will be part of and valued in the community where they are studying. Secondly, it also enables the community to get to know these young people and to feel comfortable and confident that these young people are bringing real value, interest and diversity to our community.

I was invited to address the event, which was held at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre. It is about a 500-seat auditorium and it was full. It was just wonderful to look out and see young faces from around the world, in all their diversity, coming into our area to study, full of hopes for their future and dreams of what their qualifications will allow them to do with their lives. It was a really good event. The event itself was not only for students of the university, although it had facilitated it; it was also for students who are coming to study at our TAFEs and indeed for some students who are coming to study in our schools. So it was across all the sectors for international students in our region. I spoke to them about why I am so passionate about international student engagement in Australia. When I gave the speech the report of the Baird review into vocational sector issues had not been handed to government, but it has since and I recognise the efforts of Mr Baird, a former colleague on the economics committee of this House during the period of the past government, in that critically important area.

Not only is there the economic issue. These young people come to a region like ours to study and they spend money in the area, but the interest that they create in their home country
amongst their families and friends, encouraging them to visit as tourists, is really valuable. Decades ago, post World War II, many countries in the West started scholarships and programs to encourage people from developing countries to study in their country. The principles that lay behind those schemes at the time are just as relevant in today’s world—that is, the more we know each other the less we fear each other. It is a really important component of international peace and friendship. When people travel to another nation, with a different culture, a different language and a different religious base, and they form friendships, they go away with a positive feeling about that place, and that contributes to a much happier world across all the challenges that we face in modern times. I challenge young people—as their parents and their teachers would be telling them—to not only study hard and get a good qualification but also make friendships, learn about the place they were and become lifetime ambassadors about world peace and understanding of difference and diversity.

It was a wonderful event. We went from the hall to the open area. There were stalls, dancing, music and food. I commend the organisers of the event. It is a great initiative. I reaffirm my great commitment to the importance and value of international students studying in Australia and our value of their work.

**Barker Electorate: Kimberley-Clark Australia**

Mr SECKER (Barker) (12.56 pm)—In the short time that is available to me I wish to raise an issue of great concern and angst in my electorate. It concerns the Kimberley-Clark mill in the township of Millicent. Millicent is in my electorate of Barker. It is a town with a little over 5,000 people and about 700 of those are employed at the Kimberley-Clark factory. The Kimberley-Clark factory uses a lot of our wood products and produces tissues, toilet paper and that sort of thing. The government, quite rightly, commissioned a report into whether, under WTO rules, tissue is being dumped in Australia by Indonesia, Thailand and China—countries like that. That report showed that, yes, those countries were dumping tissue and toilet paper in Australia to a quite extensive amount and up to 60 per cent below the cost of production.

When you are faced with that sort of evidence—that product is actually being dumped in Australia, which affects what is produced in Australia and is competing unfairly with what is produced in Australia—I would have thought that the government would have said, ‘We’re going to impose some penalties in the form of tariffs or whatever on the tissue that is being dumped in Australia.’ But, unfortunately, about four weeks ago the Attorney-General announced that they were not going to take any action. That really surprises me. It would really concern me if this company, which has invested millions of dollars into some of the latest technology, world’s best technology, to produce tissue and toilet paper in Australia, is affected and has to close up shop. That would be an absolute travesty. As the Prime Minister said, we want a country that makes things, not just imports things. This decision needs a rethink by the government because, under the WTO rules, we have the right to impose penalties on the dumped product. I am just amazed that they have not done so.

Question agreed to.

**Main Committee adjourned at 1.00 pm, until Monday, 15 March 2010, at 4.00 pm, unless in accordance with standing order 186 an alternative date or time is fixed.**
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Independent Review of Sport
(Question No. 1144)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Sport, in writing, on 26 November 2009:
In respect of the Government’s Independent Review of Sport: what was the total expense incurred by her department (i) for the Independent Sport Panel members, and (ii) to undertake the Independent Review of Sport.

Ms Kate Ellis—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Total expenses are yet to be finalised.

Hearing Services
(Question No. 1193)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Minister for Ageing, in writing, on 4 February 2010:
Why does the Government cover 100 per cent of the cost of treating hearing impediments with hearing aids, but not for hearing impediments beyond the benefit of hearing aids, ie cochlear implants, and what will it do to rectify this inequity.

Mrs Elliot—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
The Commonwealth provides funding under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program (the Program) through Australian Hearing’s Community Service Obligations, for cochlear processor upgrades, replacements, repairs and maintenance for children and young adults up to the age of 21 years. The cochlear device itself is treated as a surgically implanted prosthetic device and is funded either through public hospital arrangements or private health insurance, Medicare benefits are provided for the surgery for private patients and any follow-up treatment.

Implantable hearing devices (such as cochlear implants) are provided under a range of Commonwealth and state/territory funding arrangements. The Commonwealth provides funds to each state and territory government to assist with the cost of providing public hospital services, to enable these devices to be provided free of charge to public patients. Additionally, the Commonwealth provides support through legislated minimum benefits that private health insurers must pay for cochlear implants that are included on the Prostheses List and funds services through Medicare.