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SITTING DAYS—2010

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—EIGHTH 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

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

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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;
Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
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 and Minister for Population Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Minister for Human Services and Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law Hon. Chris Bowen MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
RUDD MINISTRY—continued

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

Leader of the Opposition Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Shadow Treasurer
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Attorney-General and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Defence
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services
Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Food Security, Fisheries and Forestry
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Deregulation, Competition Policy and Sustainable Cities
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Shadow Minister for Finance and Debt Reduction and Chairman of the Coalition Policy Development Committee

[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, Customs and Border Protection  
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 and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate  
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 and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research  
Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2 pm and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS
Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport will be absent from question time this week as she is in South Africa promoting Australia’s FIFA World Cup bid. The Deputy Prime Minister will answer questions in relation to early childhood education, child care and youth and the Minister for Health and Ageing will answer questions in relation to sport on her behalf.

CONDOLENCES
Sapper Jacob Daniel Moerland
Sapper Darren James Smith
Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—I move:
That the House record its deep sorrow at the deaths of Sapper Jacob Daniel Moerland and Sapper Darren James Smith on 7 June 2010, while on combat operations in Afghanistan and place on record its greatest appreciation of their service to our country and tender its profound sympathy to their families in their bereavement.

I wish to express heartfelt condolences to Sapper Moerland’s parents, Sandra and Robert, his sisters Bethany and Laura, and his fiancee, Kezia. I also wish to express heartfelt condolences to Sapper Smith’s wife, Angela, and his 2½-year-old son, Mason, and his parents, Graham and Amanda. I wish to express my deepest sympathy to both Sapper Moerland’s and Sapper Smith’s extended families and their friends, including their fellow service men and women of the Australian Defence Force with whom they served with pride and with honour, in particular the men and women of the 1st Mentoring Task Force at Tarin Kowt in Afghanistan who this day continue to serve our country with distinction.

On Monday, 7 June, Australia lost two of its bravest sons. Sapper Moerland and Sapper Smith were both outstanding soldiers and valued members of the Brisbane based 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment. They were heirs to a great military tradition, that of the combat engineer—that group of soldiers who accept great personal danger to protect their fellow soldiers. They were also heirs to the great tradition of Anzac. Sapper Moerland and Sapper Smith had both shown strong commitment and professionalism throughout their military careers.

Sapper Jacob Moerland was a loving son and brother who was engaged to be married. Sapper Moerland was proud to serve his country. His family has said:
Jacob died doing the job he loved and he went to Afghanistan not because he had to, but he thought it was a valuable job to do to help the people in Afghanistan.

Sapper Darren Smith was a loving husband and father. His wife, Angela, has said:
He was very passionate about his job and understood the risks involved but he was the sort of man who always put others first and did his best for them whether it was his mates in the army or at home with his family and his friends.

Darren also loved his explosives detection dog, Herbie, who was also, sadly, killed in this incident. These dogs also do a great job for Australia, and all animal lovers will be saddened by that dog’s loss.

On the day that this occurred I spoke with these soldiers’ commanding officers in Tarin Kowt to express to them and to all our soldiers in the field the solidarity and support of the Australian people. Those who feel and experience this loss upfront and first are their comrades in arms who are with them and who bring their broken bodies back to the
base at Tarin Kowt. Our soldiers are taking this well. They are strong and they are resolute. They also mourn the loss of comrades.

As I have done in the past, I have also spoken individually to members of these two soldiers’ families, to their parents and partners. Nothing can compare with the grief which is experienced by a mother and a father, a wife, a partner, when the news comes. This is a terrible job to perform for the Australian Defence Force. They do it with dignity and they do it with distinction. When they arrive at a person’s house to tell them this news it is the most sobering moment for them. It is a terrible moment for the families. As we stand here and reflect today on the grief which the nation feels and the grief which these soldiers’ families and loved ones feel now and into the future.

The one thing which, in my experience in speaking to these families, gives hope and consolation is this: the mission in which they are engaged is an important one. It is one which has value in it. It is not simply a military operation here or a military operation there. It is actually doing something real on behalf of a core set of Australian and human values. And what is that? It is making sure that the country of Afghanistan does not return to the clutch of terrorists. Terrorists trained in the main part in Afghanistan over the last decade have been responsible for the murder in cold blood of about 100 Australians. The resolve of our men and women in uniform is not to allow that country to become that sort of training base again in the future. Those are the core values which they were serving on our collective behalf, and those are the values which we salute in the loss of these brave soldiers today.

On behalf of the Australian government and all members of this House, we offer our prayers and our support to Sapper Moerland’s family, to Sapper Smith’s family, to their friends and their fellow soldiers, at this extraordinarily difficult and sad time.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (2.07 pm)—I join with the Prime Minister in expressing deep sorrow at the deaths on active service in Afghanistan of Sappers Darren James Smith and Jacob Daniel Moerland. I understand that the members for Paterson and Fadden recently met with our combat engineers in Oruzgan province, including Sapper Smith, and can attest to their professionalism and the pride they take in serving our country in this way.

We place our soldiers on a pedestal of respect precisely because of the risks they run on our behalf. Certainly our soldiers understand the consequences for the world and for Australia should Afghanistan once more become a safe haven for terrorists. As these deaths demonstrate, no-one should underestimate the dangers faced by Australian and allied soldiers in Afghanistan. Service personnel from the United States, Britain and France, as well as from Australia, have been killed in action in the last week and this is a sad reminder of the price paid for freedom. On behalf of the coalition members of this parliament, I too offer heartfelt condolences to the families and to the loved ones of Sapper Smith and Sapper Moerland.

The SPEAKER—As a mark of respect, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Debate (on motion by Mr Albanese) adjourned.
Tuesday, 15 June 2010  HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  5303

MAIN COMMITTEE
Sapper Darren James Smith
Sapper Jacob Daniel Moerland
Reference

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (2.09 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the order of the day for the resumption of the debate on the Prime Minister’s motion of condolence in connection with the deaths of Sapper Darren James Smith and Sapper Jacob Daniel Moerland, be referred to the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

CANLEY VALE AIR CRASH

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (2.10 pm)—On indulgence, I wish to advise the House that earlier this morning there was a fatal light aircraft accident at Canley Vale Heights near Bankstown Airport. I am advised that that police have confirmed that the two people on board the aircraft have both died. This is a tragic accident. My condolences—and, I am sure, the condolences of all in the House—go out to the families and friends of those affected by this tragedy. An investigation team from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau has just arrived at the accident site. It is not appropriate to speculate on the causes of this accident at this early stage, before safety authorities have been given the opportunity to undertake their investigations. As the ATSB’s investigation continues and more information becomes available, the ATSB will report on the progress of their investigation, which will include a preliminary factual report in 30 days and updates on their website. I thank the House.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (2.11 pm)—On indulgence, Mr Speaker, let me associate myself with the comments made by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. It is always a tragedy when an aircraft accident takes the lives of Australian pilots and passengers. Our aviation industry is a very safe one and we can be proud of that. It is important that the causes of the accident be properly investigated. Whilst little information is available yet in relation to the details of the people who have lost their lives, I extend the sympathies of the opposition to their families and friends.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Mr TRUSS (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Trade. I refer the minister to his criticism of the government’s lack of consultation with the mining industry prior to its decision to impose a great big new tax on mining. As the Minister for Trade and a former minister for resources, was he consulted by the ‘gang of four’ before they made their mining tax decision?

Mr CREAN—Wonders never cease! It has taken three years to get a question on trade and what do we get? We get a question on consultation. It matters to have a decent memory in this place. I remember back in 1999, as Deputy Leader of the Opposition, when there was supposed consultation between the then government and us in relation to new taxes. The Labor Party of the day gave its full support to a revenue-neutral outcome in terms of taxation, a letter and an agreement that was signed off by the Treasurer of the day, Peter Costello—and an agreement that was never honoured. So do not come in here and talk to us about consultation. The key question for you is: do you honour your commitments?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! To shorten proceedings, I indicate to the minister that that was a lengthy preamble and he should go to the question.

CHAMBER
Mr CREAN—it has taken three years to get a question. I am entitled to give it a pre-amble.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister should contain his enthusiasm.

Mr CREAN—I am enthusiastic about trade but they are not, Mr Speaker. They never ask a question about it. If they are interested in the impact of trade in relation to this tax, I can tell them the conversations I have had in Japan and China recently are ones that are very supportive of the direction of this tax because it will increase the supply side of the equation, get a better match between the demand for our resources and our ability to more efficiently produce it. What we are doing is introducing a tax that takes out the disincentives that currently exist—disincentives that relate to the requirement to pay royalties before any profit is turned. This tax that we are introducing will effectively eliminate those royalties upfront.

Mr Randall—Were you consulted?

Mr CREAN—as for consultation, of course I was consulted. We operate as an effective cabinet, not a rabble like you are over there. The only person in this parliament it would seem who does not believe we need reform in the mining industry is that person sitting over there, the Leader of the Opposition. For him there would be no change; for us, we want to make this industry more efficient, more competitive, and the proposals that we have put forward are going to do that. Not only will we continue to have those discussions amongst ourselves; we will continue to have them with the industry to achieve a sensible outcome for the future of this country. The sooner you get on board and support that direction, the better for this country.

The SPEAKER—not that I am overly sensitive, but the minister should address his remarks through the chair.

Economy

Mr TREVOR (2.16 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the strength of Australia’s economy and the importance of reform for the future?

Mr RUDD—it is good to hear the Minister for Trade in fine form today. The member for Flynn asks a question concerning the importance of dealing with economic reform and the importance of its impact on the region that he represents. The government is committed to keeping the economy strong and to delivering a fairer share for all working families. That is why, when the nation was threatened with the global financial crisis, we did what we had to do to keep Australia out of recession. That is why we are committed to bringing the budget back to surplus in three years time, three years ahead of time. That is why, as of 1 July, the government will deliver its third set of tax cuts for working families. For someone who is on about $50,000 a year, that represents a tax cut of nearly 20 per cent. Keeping the economy strong has also enabled us to increase our investment in the hospital system of Australia by 50 per cent and to increase our investment in infrastructure, including the installation of a national broadband network. Also, on this day and in this sitting fortnight the government, as a result of keeping the economy strong, will deliver Australia’s first paid parental leave scheme—an important reform for the nation. So we have 12 years of inaction on the part of those opposite, and the scheme is brought in by this government in its first term in office.

The government has continued to do the job that we began to keep the economy strong and to deliver a fairer share for working families. That is reflected in what we saw in the labour force data which came out only last week. This is worth emphasising. Unem-
ployment in this country is 5.2 per cent. Furthermore, employment has grown by 2.6 per cent through the year to May 2010. This is the ninth consecutive rise in the number of people engaged in full-time employment. If we compare that with the unemployment data we have seen from around the world, it is galvanising. There is 5.2 per cent unemployment in Australia. In the United States it is now up to 9.9 per cent; France, 9.9 per cent; Canada, 8.1 per cent; and the UK, eight per cent. But actually look at the numbers of people who are losing jobs and gaining employment. In the US, nearly six million people have lost their jobs. In Canada, nearly 100,000 people have lost their jobs. In the UK, more than half a million people have lost their jobs. In the euro area, 3½ million people have lost their jobs. In Australia, we have added 255,000 more jobs during the period of this crisis.

Part of keeping the economy strong means also delivering on long-term economic reform. That is where tax reform comes in as well—boosting Australia’s global competitiveness by ensuring that we are bringing our company tax rate down; boosting also Australia’s level of national savings by some $85 billion over the decade ahead, an important buffer for the future against future external shocks; boosting also superannuation for working families, and for a 30-year-old now there is a $108,000 difference for the future; and boosting also investment in infrastructure, funding the rail, road and ports needed by our resource sector and those communities that support it. It is interesting to see where this tax reform debate has got to. We on this side of the House support tax reform in the mining industry and for the country at large. We support it, but also the principle of tax reform based on profits as opposed to production is now embraced by the government, by the Minerals Council of Australia and by most of the major miners—they believe that reform is necessary for the sector. There is just one person who opposes that, and that is the Leader of the Opposition, who says that no reform is necessary, that a production based tax through royalties should be retained and that the mining companies are paying too much tax. The whole country says we need reform for the mining industry tax arrangements based on profit, not on production. The Leader of the Opposition says no.

This brings me to the electorate of Flynn and the impact of what we are proposing for future infrastructure investments. Each time I have been to the honourable member’s electorate I have been presented with one request after another by the Gladstone Regional Council of their needs. Those opposite, if they have been to Gladstone, would have noticed one thing: you see an array of ships out there waiting to be loaded at harbour. I notice that those opposite raise questions about this and they find it amusing. When you look at export dollars for Australia being lost from a failure to invest in infrastructure, that is no laughing matter. It means we have to make a difference. When I was in Gladstone most recently with the member for Flynn, the Gladstone Regional Council then were embracing the needs of the region and discussing how to support the future housing requirements, transport needs and roads construction for the big expansion of its local population coming off the back of the mining sector and that broader community.

The bottom line is this: the region in Central Queensland faces a desperate need for infrastructure and it therefore needs greater investment in infrastructure. That is why the government has brought forward a regional infrastructure fund which is designed to deliver better infrastructure for the people of Gladstone, for the people of Mackay, for the people of Karratha, for the people of Kalgoorlie and for those communities which
support our mining industries. That is what the regions of Australia are crying out for.

There has been a lot of speculation over the processes concerning tax reform. I wish to inform the House that, as of the week that has just gone past, consultation and negotiation continue with our major mining companies. Some of those companies are a long way down the path towards agreement; others are still some distance away. This is a tough debate from which the government does not retreat because it is a necessary part of long-term economic reform.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I refer to page 554 of the House of Representatives Practice where it does indicate that the Speaker has no specific power to order someone to sit down with length of answer but often persuasion is exercised. I would ask you to exercise your persuasion.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister is responding to the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—It is pretty interesting when you think about the needs for infrastructure, because the good old Leader of the National Party was out there the other day on this question as well. When fronted on it in Wide Bay, he had this to say:

A great deal of our nation’s wealth that’s helped see us through the global economic downturn has actually come from the regions and I think there ought to be a compact with the regions under which the government guarantees a fair return, a fair share of our nation’s growth and prosperity in the wealth of the regions so that we can provide proper services and facilities.

Does it sound familiar? Does it sound familiar to those who have been observing this debate? Of course our regions need greater investment. We on this side of the House have provided a basis by which that investment can be undertaken for the future. The bottom line is this: if you are going to keep our economy strong for the future, you have got to prosecute continued economic reform. If you are going to deliver a fairer share for working families, better super, tax cuts and tax breaks also for small business, you have got to get on with the business of economic reform. That is what the government is determined to do. We have a plan for reform to keep our economy strong and to deliver a fairer share for working families. I do not see any form of alternative.

Budget

Ms O'Dwyer (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy. At what stage were you consulted about the government’s decision to impose a great big new tax? Was it before the decision was taken by the ‘gang of four’?

Mr Martin Ferguson—I thank the member for Higgins for the question. I start by saying that thinking about a profits based tax is not new to this government. I remind the member for Higgins it is something the industry has desired for a long time. It is something that her previous employer, the then Treasurer and her predecessor the former member for Higgins, failed to front up to. I say that because tax reform has never come to Australia. Government’s capacity to deliver on tax reform requires strength of leadership. It is in that context I also remind the House that the findings and recommendations of the Henry tax review were not thought about in terms of the public debate.

The consultation process, including with individual companies and the Minerals Council of Australia, went on for almost two years. I am sure the member for Higgins, like me, also read the musings of the Secretary of Treasury in a number of speeches he made about the potential concepts that might be embraced and the development of a minerals tax proposal with respect to putting in place
a profits based tax system in Australia, something that industry long campaigned for. I simply say that these issues were also raised with me on a number of occasions by industry in the lead-up to the Henry tax review. My problem was that given my knowledge—

Honourable members interjecting—

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

Mr Melham interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Banks is warned.

Ms O'Dwyer—Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance: I specifically asked the minister when he was consulted.

The SPEAKER—The question went on to other matters as well. The minister has the call.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Yes, it is very broad ranging. It is about tax reform and the capacity of the opposition to actually deliver any decent policy outcome. I remind the House that we will deliver a profits based tax system in Australia, something that the minerals industry accepts. I also remind the House that the minerals industry basically accepts that it should be paying more taxation in Australia.

I simply say, from the government’s point of view, that I was involved in cabinet processes, as I should be, and in doing so I was not in a position prior to the release of the Henry tax report to have serious consultations and discussions about the content—not until it was publicly released and not until after the government brought forward its response to the report. So, having talked about the concepts with industry prior to its release, I simply say: I am now involved in detailed consultations about its implementation.

Infrastructure

Mr BIDGOOD (2.30 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Why is the resource super profits tax important to ensuring Australia has the infrastructure capacity that it needs to grow, and is the minister aware of any comments about the need to secure a fairer funding share for regional communities?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Dawson for his question. Indeed, the Regional Infrastructure Fund, which has been announced as part of the government’s tax reform proposals, will ensure that the government can deliver the infrastructure that Australia needs. Without this investment in infrastructure, we know that the constraints will continue. We know that there were major constraints on our export capacity during the previous mining boom. We know because the Reserve Bank warned on 20 separate occasions about skills and infrastructure constraining growth in our economy. The Regional Infrastructure Fund is aimed at promoting development and jobs in mining communities, supporting our resource and export capacity, and tackling those capacity constraints. Importantly, this fund will also ensure that communities, such as those based around Mackay, get a fair share.

We know that, at the moment, if anything symbolises the failure of the connection between infrastructure and our resource growth, it is the fact that many working Australians travel over 4,000 kilometres to get to work. If people think that that is good economically, if people think that that is good in terms of efficiency or, more importantly perhaps, if people think that that has good social outcomes, then they indeed have rocks in their head that should be mined! Because we know that these constraints are simply unacceptable. And you do not have to take the
government’s position on that; the Minerals Council warned that the private sector cannot invest and grow when they said:

… too often governments in the past have abrogated their responsibility to local communities and thus constrained the investment that private sector has wanted to make.

They used one example, that of the Hunter Valley. The Minerals Council have calculated that Australia lost some $2 billion in revenue due to the failure to have the appropriate rail and port infrastructure in place—$2 billion over just a five-year period.

Some, of course, do not agree with the Minerals Council, and one of those is the Leader of the Opposition, who last week, in response to the announcement about the Regional Infrastructure Fund, stated that it was the job of the private sector to do this infrastructure development. Of course, much of this infrastructure development does not relate directly to the profits of individual companies, and there are constraints and impacts on communities as a result of that. A good example is Mackay—and I am amazed that the Leader of the Opposition did not take a good look at the CBD of Mackay when he visited the electorate of Dawson just last week. If he had, he would know that there are significant problems with B-doubles going on roads that are also used by the communities who live in Mackay. There is a real issue with the ring-road in Mackay. It is the sort of project which could be eligible for funding under the Regional Infrastructure Fund.

Those opposite are all over the shop, because, whilst the Leader of the Opposition is stating that he opposes this, just yesterday the Leader of the Nationals said, ‘Much of our nation’s wealth is produced in the regions; we want a fair share of that to return to the regions,’ and in April Senator Barnaby Joyce said, ‘We have to acknowledge that infrastructure spending has to occur in the regions.’ They have been out there in individual electorates calling for infrastructure spending in our regions—and yet, when there is a precise, clear proposal to deliver just that, they are against it. They are also against the boost to superannuation and they are of course against the cut in company tax.

We have a clear position, which is that infrastructure development cannot be left behind like it was during the first mining boom, because not only is it a constraint on our economic growth but it also has a devastating impact on the communities where that growth is occurring.

**Budget**

Mr KEENAN (2.36 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. What advice did the minister seek from her department regarding the impact on jobs of the government’s great big new tax on mining before the gang of four’s decision to impose the tax?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I draw to the member’s attention—and I am sure he would have noted this—that the unemployment statistic came out last Thursday at the rate of 5.2 per cent. On the question of jobs: I know that members on this side of the House are very interested in how many Australians are unemployed and to see falling unemployment—5.2 per cent—

Mr Hockey—you inherited four per cent.

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow Treasurer for his interjection and remind him, in case he missed it, of the global financial crisis and the global recession. He may choose to do some reading on that at some point, particularly as he is seeking to present himself as the man who has the ability to run Australia’s macro-economy. He might want to catch up with that little bit of news, which has obviously entirely missed his attention.
On the question I have been asked: for the resource super profits tax there is Treasury modelling about the impact on the industry, including the impact on employment. The modelling shows that the industry would continue to grow and consequently job opportunities would continue to grow. I understand that the opposition are involved in a fear campaign here, because that is what the opposition do. They are long on complaint and short on solution. I say to members opposite: let us look at the entirety of the package. There is the resource super profits tax, the company tax reduction, tax breaks for small businesses, superannuation and the regional infrastructure that my colleagues have talked about today. If you take the package as a whole, we are obviously talking about a net positive benefit to the economy, including job opportunities.

If the member wants to be honest about the question of employment, step 1 is to be honest about the figures last week, step 2 is to be honest about the impact of economic stimulus on those figures—the economic stimulus that of course you opposed—and step 3 is to be honest about this package. It would be a change.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask the Deputy Prime Minister to table the Treasury modelling on employment that she referred to in her answer.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat. Now there is quiet, I call the Treasurer.

Mr SWAN—It is very important in this debate to acknowledge that there are lots of people in this country, particularly on low and modest incomes, who have a very big stake in its outcome. I think that is understood fairly and squarely on this side of the House, but is certainly not understood by those on that side of the House, who somehow believe that the mining community is paying too much tax. That is what the Leader of the Opposition has said. The Leader of the Opposition is advocating a cut in tax to the mining industry whilst on the other hand wanting to increase rates of company tax. Get that? What sort of twisted priority could get the opposition to the point where they think there should be a tax cut for very profitable miners and on the other hand want to increase tax for corporate Australia? What sort of twisted economic logic could lead to that position?

It is refreshing to hear from those people in the community who are represented by organisations such as ACOSS, the ACTU and the Consumers Federation.

Mr SWAN—You can hear and see the contempt that those opposite have for people on modest incomes who are represented by organisations that have had their say in the
last 24 hours. You can understand why they stand for the implementation of Work Choices in full, because they do not understand the importance of these measures to the living standards of people in this country who are on low and modest incomes. They most particularly do not understand the importance of the support for superannuation, particularly for people on modest incomes.

These are very vital economic reforms which will lift the living standards of millions of workers in this country, and those opposite have nothing but contempt for those people and the organisations that represent them. It is good to hear from ACOSS. It is good to hear from the ACTU. It is good to hear from the Conservation Foundation. It is good to hear from the Consumers Federation. I know those opposite do not want to hear it, but let us go through what they have had to say. The Consumers Federation said:

The RSPT is good policy—a tax on resources should be part of a sound tax base—and it comes with ... off-sets in other parts of the tax-base, so it has the added virtue of rebalancing a base out of kilter.

Unlike many other products, the resources aren’t mobile—they are in the ground. Australian ground. All Australians should benefit from this luck of geography, not just a well-heeled few.

Nothing could summarise the situation better than that.

We do have to face up to the need for fundamental economic reform to lift our national savings to support Australian workers on low incomes. We also have to face up to the need to invest in infrastructure, particularly in mining areas. Of course, some in the National Party, but apparently not in this parliament, understand the need to do that. We understand the need to invest in capacity in the mining regions. Those opposite do not. We also understand the needs of 3.5 million Australians who will benefit from what we are doing immediately in superannuation, the 8.4 million workers who will benefit from the 12 per cent guarantee or the 2.4 million small businesses which will benefit from the tax write-off of up to $5,000.

This is what economic reform is all about, and that is what is not understood by those opposite. We saw the shadow Treasurer say last week that the stimulus had nothing to do with keeping Australia out of recession. They simply do not understand it. They get all the big economic calls wrong and they have got this economic call wrong. We on this side of the House understand the importance of economic reform to lift living standards and to put in place a modern tax system.

Budget

Mr ABBOTT (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to various public statements concerning the timing of a resolution to the mining tax issue. Last Friday, the Prime Minister said there were weeks and probably months of consultation to go. On the same day, the Treasurer said the government would soon move to the third phase of finalising the design. Yesterday, Senator Mark Bishop said that it needs to be addressed and resolved urgently. This morning, the finance minister said that you cannot put a timeslot on it, while the member for Brand said that the debate should be settled in the next few weeks, and then subsequently said it should be settled by August. My question to the Prime Minister is: when will he finally end this amateur hour experimentation with Australia’s economic future and dump this bad tax?

Mr RUDD—It took three questions from those opposite to build up to the crescendo of the Leader of the Opposition’s first question.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The question has been asked.
Mr Rudd—I notice his question is about the detail of consultation and the detail of negotiation. If the Leader of the Opposition had any experience on questions of the economy he would understand that, when you bring about fundamental tax reform, it involves complex consultations with companies and it involves complex negotiations with companies. That is what the government is engaged in. That is what any government engaged in the business of fundamental tax reform would be doing, and that is what we are doing. He raises more broadly the question of consultation. Can I simply draw his attention to the fact that—whether or not he or his colleagues have been asleep for the last two years—this entire debate has been out there through public documents released by the Treasury on where the overall direction of tax reform was going.

First and foremost, on 2 May 2008, the government announced that we would be having the review into the tax system. On 6 August 2008, a discussion paper was released on the tax review entitled Architecture of Australia's tax and transfer system. That document, that discussion paper, raised the inefficiencies of royalties and pointed to a profits based tax. If you go to that paper it said:

These royalties can discourage high risk investments (for example, in the case of an ad valorem royalty, revenue can be collected even when net losses are being made).

It went on to say—if the Leader of the Opposition had any interest in the tax arrangements for the resource sector of the economy at large—back in August 2008:

A resource rent tax does not apply until a firm has earned above normal profits. Once this occurs, the combined tax rate on the total return increases as the resource price increases.

Back in August 2008, the government called for further public submissions. In December 2008, the government released a further, more detailed, consultation paper which went down to the definition of what constituted supernormal profits. It also went on to make reference to calculation bases which were linked to the long-term government bond rate.

Through until May of 2009, there have been 1,300 submissions from the mining industry including from the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies and the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, and including recommendations from the MCA on the question of adopting a profits based tax system for the future. Then between June and November of 2009, industry, professional and community groups further consulted on the question of broader tax reform including that for the industry.

So, for those opposite to infer that this is somehow some bolt from the blue on consultation concerning the future reform of tax arrangements for the mining industry and, more broadly, for the economy, this process has been under way for two years—had the Leader of the Opposition any interest in any matter concerning economic policy and tax policy. The government is now in the business of consultation with the mining industry. The government is now in the business of negotiation with the mining industry and the government is now engaged in detailed negotiations on details of implementation and generous transition arrangements. That is the normal way in which you engage in a process of tax reform.

The government believes that this reform is delivering better super for working families, better tax arrangements for the rest of the economy and is boosting our level of national saving and, critically, is investing in regional infrastructure of the type called for by the Leader of the National Party when he was in regional Queensland the other day hoping that no-one would listen to what he
was saying. Frankly, these are the factors at stake in fundamental tax reform. We are engaged in consultation, we are engaged in negotiation and we will prosecute that to the extent that it is necessary to reach an appropriate settlement for the national economic interest for the future of the mining companies in this country and for a fairer share for working families across the Australian community.

**Budget**

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism. Will the minister inform the House about the progress of consultation with the resources industry regarding the resource super profits tax?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

Mr Laming interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Bowman, on behalf of others, will leave the chamber for one hour under the provisions of standing order 94(a), and two of his colleagues further down the bench know that they are very lucky.

The member for Bowman then left the chamber.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the member for Dobell for his question. It goes to the task of putting in place what the petroleum and minerals industry has long argued for in Australia—a profits based tax system—because they think that is in their long-term best interests. I remind the House that, when we announced our response to the Henry tax review committee report on 2 May, the government established a high-level tax consultation committee. That committee delivered its first report to the Prime Minister and the Treasurer just over a week and a half ago. On the basis of that report, the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and I have been deeply involved in discussions with industry about the nature of that report.

I express the government’s appreciation to those companies, both big and small, who have seriously engaged in discussions with the tax consultation committee and with the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and me over the last week and a half. Right across my portfolio, be they in mining, petroleum, coal seam methane or oil and gas, those companies have acknowledged that this is a serious and genuine process of consultation. That was evidenced today by the meeting between the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and me and the CEO of British Gas. She acknowledged the productive nature of these discussions. Her sector, I might say, was the first in the door on 3 May after the government’s announcements of 2 May.

I understand the importance of this sector, because what we are talking about is a new industry. That Queensland project alone represents a potential investment of $12 billion to $15 billion—and the opposition dare to raise the question of employment. This is about major employment opportunities in Australia. I know how disheartened the opposition were last week when they saw the good employment results—a terrific employment result for Australia following the impact of the global financial crisis.

If you have any doubts about the importance of those discussions, I simply say that these discussions with British Gas are not new to the government. The delivery of this project started with detailed meetings with that company early in 2008. That led to an announcement on 24 March this year of the world’s first LNG contract signed between Australia, British Gas and CNOOC. As the Minister for Trade acknowledges, we are talking about a deal potentially worth 3.6 million tonnes of LNG per annum to the Chinese national oil corporation. In volume
terms, this is the single biggest company-to-company LNG contract in Australia’s history, totalling 72 million tonnes over 20 years.

For those reasons, companies such as British Gas and others right across my portfolio have approached discussions to better inform outcomes in a productive and constructive way. And so they should, because they themselves argued long and hard that we should put this type of tax reform in place in Australia. They do not like the royalties based system because, when times are bad, they are still required to pay tax. They actually believe that, over time, this will be a far better tax system for them and a far better tax system for Australia. That is what this debate is about. In that context can I say—

Mr Ian Macfarlane interjecting—

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—The member for Groom asks whom I am speaking to. I am talking to people who have skin in the game—people who invest in Australia and who employ people in Australia. That would be a new thing for the Leader of the Opposition, because he has no practical understanding of the importance of investment and business activities in Australia—because he finds economics boring. On that note, I simply say that we as a government are making progress and we will continue to have these discussions, because it is about getting the balance right. This is the balance that is required.

Unlike the opposition, we accept that the Australian community is entitled to a fair return for the opportunity to develop its natural resources—100 per cent owned by the Australian community. We also have a strong view, as does the Australian community, that we are entitled to a fairer share from business for the opportunity of developing those natural resources. This debate is not just about the question of a profits based tax system in Australia but about fundamental change to the taxation system in Australia, including a significant reduction in company taxation. This is of major significance to me as the Minister for Tourism, because tourism is an industry principally made up of small- and medium-sized business opportunities, quite often in regional Australia.

The government will continue to engage in these constructive and productive processes. We are about putting in place an appropriate outcome. I assure the Australian community that there will be a profits based system in Australia that is accepted by industry. And so it should be, because that is what they have argued for, long and hard. When it is all over, we will end up with a system that is fairer for Australia and balanced for industry. The only people that will stand in opposition will be the Leader of the Opposition and the coalition party room—just like they opposed our activities during the global financial crisis to maintain the strength of the Australian economy and minimise the impact on families through maintaining the best possible employment opportunities for the Australian community. We will continue, despite the endeavours of the coalition to run a fear campaign, to have these constructive discussions because this is about the long-term best interests of Australia. That is what governs the Australian government, unlike the self-interest which governs the other side of the House.

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (2.57 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the recent report on Nine News of his great big new tax on mining and its impact on the Queensland towns on Wandoan and Miles. I refer specifically to Rachel Kerwick of the Miles and District Chamber of Commerce who, in reference to the Xstrata development, said:

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We’ve been waiting for this for years. It’s finally here, everyone’s excited. We don’t need the mining tax to ruin it.

Prime Minister, how will these towns survive when these projects do not go ahead because of the government’s bungled big new tax on mining?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for North Sydney for his question. I am advised that, on 3 June, Xstrata said that it would suspend exploration at Wandoan coalmine and said it would jeopardise jobs in construction and operations over the next five years. The Financial Review, I noticed, reported on 11 June that Xstrata’s executive general manager for the Wandoan coal project, Steve Bridger, said the company would continue to pursue the approval of a mining lease from the state government and would continue buying up land in the 32,000-hectare exploration area.

This brings me to the broader question of the integrity of various claims that have been made concerning the proposed impact of this taxation regime and the fear campaign which those opposite are engaged in. Let me go through some of these in sequence, having dealt with the Wandoan matter. Let us not forget the claim made on 4 May that Cape Lambert announced that the RSPT would jeopardise its future operations in Australia. That was just five days before the chief executive of Cape Lambert proceeded to buy a million dollars worth of Cape Lambert shares. That is the first one. We then had the Liberals saying that BHP was cancelling its Olympic Dam project. That is the second one. The opposition said the new tax was already threatening multibillion dollar investments, most of all the $22 billion expansion of Olympic Dam in South Australia. The shadow finance minister said that Olympic Dam would be put off for 10 to 20 years. However, we then had BHP CEO Marius Kloppers say on 26 May:

… it is not frozen. We are carrying on. We are spending money, there are 200 engineers working on it. Otherwise we would have made a statement to the contrary.

The third example goes to Xstrata, which I referred to before. Then of course we had a splash, I understand, in the Australian newspaper on 6 May, which stated:

… Rio Tinto has shelved plans to spend $11 billion expanding its … iron ore operations in Western Australia …

Three hours after that and after a two percentage point fall in share prices, Rio submitted a notice to the ASX market which included the following statement:

Rio Tinto today confirmed that no decision has been made to shelve any projects in Australia …

Then we go on to various statements which have been made one after the other by other mining companies. I go also to a report in the Financial Review on 9 June which said that the Chinalco bauxite development in Aurukun would join the eight projects worth $55 billion that had been put on hold due to the government’s resources tax. At 2.18 pm that day Reuters reported that Chinalco denied dropping the Queensland project. It reported that Chinalco had said that it had no internal discussions on pulling out of its $3.04 billion Aurukun bauxite project and that it was carrying out feasibility studies and comparing proposals. Furthermore, quoting Mr Lu Youqing Chinalco:

We do not have the consideration of withdrawing—

from this project. It is one example after the other of exaggeration and overclaim (a) by various companies from time to time but (b) being harnessed by those opposite to prosecute a fear campaign. What this says is that the member for North Sydney does not do his homework. It says that the member for North Sydney picks up a clipping from a newspaper and equates that with fundamen-
tal, deep research. We expect higher standards from the member for North Sydney in this debate in this chamber. I would suggest if those opposite are running fear campaigns, the first and foremost requirement is to get your facts straight.

Iran

Mr MURPHY (3.02 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Minister, will you advise the House of steps taken by the Australian government to enforce new United Nations Security Council sanctions against Iran. What other measures is Australia taking?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the member for his question, dealing as it does with potentially the most difficult international peace and security issue that the international community will be confronted with over the next 12 to 18 months. On 9 June the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1929 imposing new sanctions against Iran. Australia welcomed that resolution, which reflected the international community’s continuing concern about Iran’s nuclear program and its ongoing failure to be in compliance with its international obligations. Australia together with the international community has repeatedly called on Iran to conduct itself in accordance with International Atomic Energy Agency resolutions and to comply with Security Council resolutions. Indeed, the International Atomic Energy Agency’s two most recent reports in February and May this year both found that Iran continues to enrich uranium in breach of its international obligations and that it has not provided either the necessary evidence or the necessary cooperation to persuade the IAEA that its program is exclusively for peaceful purposes. Australia also shares the Security Council’s desire for a negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, which of course requires Iran to change its policy.

We continue to urge Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment programs. Despite these overtures, we are disappointed that Iran has not reversed its path. Indeed, very many people analyse that as a path of confrontation with the international community.

Security Council resolution 1929 strengthens obligations on nation states to prevent the supply to Iran of goods and services that could contribute to Iran’s nuclear industry—a proliferation sensitive nuclear industry—and also to its missile delivery technology and programs. As well, it imposes a heavy obligation on the part of nation states to prevent the supply of military equipment and related services to Iran. The resolution also targets Iran’s transport and financial sectors as well as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in response to the corps’ role in Iran’s nuclear activities and the development of a weapons system. The resolution includes new financial sanctions against 41 individuals and entities in Iran. Australia’s United Nations enforcement sanctions law will see that those financial sanctions have immediate effect and Australia will implement the other aspects of the resolution as expeditiously as possible.

To reinforce those measures, earlier today I announced that Australia will impose additional autonomous sanctions against one individual and two organisations that assist Iran in its violation of its obligations under Security Council resolutions. Australia has imposed autonomous sanctions against Iran since October 2008 and today’s announcement will now bring to a total of 21 individuals and 20 organisations subject to Australia’s autonomous sanctions. Those additional organisations are Bank Mellat and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines. The individual is General Rostam Qasemi, the commander of Khatem ol-Anbiya Construction Organisation, a company owned by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is
expressly referred to in resolution 1929 and already covered by our autonomous sanctions.

We are taking these additional measures to ensure that Australia is at the forefront of those countries seeking to put pressure on Iran to change its policy in this area. These additional autonomous sanctions combined with our already rigorous implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, including our proposed implementation of resolution 1929, will continue to ensure that our concern is backed up by action and that our concern matches that of the international community. As I said in my opening remarks, this is potentially the single, biggest peace and security challenge which the international community faces. Australia again calls on Iran to conduct itself in accordance with its international legal obligations and to seek to resolve this matter through a change of policy as quickly as possible.

Budget

**Mr ABBOTT** (3.07 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Mr Paul Kelly, who runs drilling rigs in north-west Queensland. As a result of the great big new tax on mining, two of his three drilling rigs are now idle, current contracts have been halved, two new projects worth up to $250,000 have disappeared and four workers are about to be laid off. My question to the Prime Minister is: why won’t he visit Cloncurry to explain to Mr Kelly that there is no problem really, that he does not have anything to worry about and that, in fact, the great big new tax on mining will be good for jobs and investment—or does he think that Mr Kelly is just part of a scare campaign conspiracy too?

**Mr RUDD**—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I am unaware of the circumstances surrounding Mr Kelly’s business, but we will now investigate the circumstances surrounding his business. I would also say in response to the Leader of the Opposition that, if he consulted the documents attached with the Treasury’s tax reform package released on 2 May, he would see that they go to the future modelling impact on the mining industry as a whole: first of all, the increase in overall investment in the mining industry by between 4.5 and 5.5 per cent; and, secondly, the overall increase in employment in the mining industry by seven per cent. I therefore am always reluctant to simply take anything which is said across the dispatch box by those opposite, particularly given the question asked just before by the member for Sydney—which went so well!—without actually further testing the facts.

I also note that, if the question asked was about developments in the state of Queensland, I should raise our good friend Mr Clive Palmer again as well. Remember, on the question of impact on projects, Clive, the patron saint of the Liberal-National Party—at least the funder-in-chief of the Liberal-National Party—

**Mr Martin Ferguson**—And campaign director.

**Mr RUDD**—and campaign director of the Liberal-National Party—told South Australians he was cancelling projects in their state. We have been at work on this now for about two or three weeks. We cannot find those projects. Nobody can find those projects. Frankly, we are of the view that those projects may never have existed. So, when it comes to scare campaigns about individual projects, we are more than interested in separating fact from fear from fiction, which is important in this debate.

What we do know is that actions always speak louder than words on this matter of the negative impact of the government’s tax reform proposal for the mining industry on the
interests of the economy at large and investors et cetera. Best proof positive still lies in that critical investment decision by the member for Dickson, because I am told his BHP shares are still out there doing—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. The Prime Minister has talked about Mr Palmer, because I am told his BHP shares are still out there doing—

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

Mr Pyne—He has talked about every other—

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

Mr Pyne interjecting—

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

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Before dealing with the Manager of Opposition Business for his outburst when he was on a warning, he raised the point of order and it was on relevance. There is no need for him to then debate the point of order, because I would indicate to the Prime Minister that he should relate his material to the question. But, because of his outburst, first of all, the member for Sturt will withdraw the remark.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—No, he will go to the dispatch box and withdraw.

Mr Pyne—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Now he will withdraw himself from the chamber. The member will withdraw under standing order 94(a).

The member for Sturt then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will relate his material to the question.

Mr RUDD—Therefore, on the impact of the government’s proposed tax reform, what we are on about is, firstly, how you grow the economy over time and, hence, the impact of the government’s tax reform proposals, by bringing down the company tax rate, by bringing down taxes also in small business and by boosting the economy, including in the regions on which the honourable member’s question was focused.

Mr Ian Macfarlane—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. This was a question about Paul Kelly, a real person, who the Leader of the Opposition—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Groom will resume his seat. On the question of relevance, I have advised the Prime Minister that he should relate his material to the question.

Mr RUDD—The question goes to impacts arising from the government’s tax proposal on employment in regions of Australia where companies are located. What I am seeking to do is respond by saying: the impact of the government’s tax reform plan, first of all, goes to the company tax rate, which we are bringing down by two percentage points—and the Leader of the Opposition is actually increasing by two percentage points. Secondly, for the small businesses in Cloncurry, they would all obtain a tax break in terms of $5,000 worth of assets purchased in a given year. On top of that again—

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The—

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Moreton, even though he displays self-restrain, should be very careful. The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, my question was about Mr Kelly, and I am prepared to provide Mr Kelly’s phone number to the
Prime Minister. If he doubts what I say, he can ring him up himself and ask him.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr RUDD—The employment impact in regions of north-west Queensland would be the aggregate effect of what we are doing in terms of (1) the tax systems applied to the mining industry, both for the exploration and for the extraction side of the industry, (2) the tax reform for other businesses operating in the industry or outside the industry, which is a two percentage point reduction in the company tax rate and (3) all the small businesses in Cloncurry to which he refers, who will benefit if they are incorporated by the two percentage point reduction in the company tax and also, significantly, in terms of the $5,000 asset tax break as well.

Taking these things together, the overall impact nationwide is a positive impact on employment in the economy and a positive impact on employment within the mining industry by 7.7 per cent. But the critical thing which I think the House would like to know is the impact of this tax overall. I am advised just now by others, by the way, that Australian mining stocks are now performing better relative to those in Canada. I would just ask people to consider that as a mere matter of fact which the member for North Sydney is not engaged in. Critically, in terms of the member for Dickson, the BHP share price is up 1.5 per cent over the last week. Onya, Pete! You have done the right thing. You have voted your confidence in the government’s overall tax reform in an investment you made two days after the government announced its tax plans. Well done, Member for Dickson.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will withdraw.

Ms SAFFIN (3.16 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister please update the House on the government’s record investment in our schools and are there any threats to this funding, particularly for the communities of northern New South Wales?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Page for her question. I know that she is deeply concerned about investing in schools in her community so that every child can get a great education and investing to support jobs, particularly during these difficult days of the global financial crisis and global recession. On this side of the House, we stand for delivering a strong economy so people can get jobs and for investing in the services that families need, making sure families get their fair share, and there is nothing more important than the quality of the local school to which their child goes.

Last week we saw some of the results of our investment in jobs with a 5.2 per cent unemployment rate. This rate has been achieved because, when faced with the global financial crisis, we did what had to be done to keep Australia working. If we had listened to the Leader of the Opposition, we would not have provided economic stimulus. We would be in recession now and hundreds of thousands of more Australians would be unemployed. Let us look at the statistics. Building the Education Revolution itself was responsible for 32 per cent of the value of non-residential building approvals over the year to April 2010—that is, a third of non-
residential economic activity was from Building the Education Revolution. If the Leader of the Opposition had his way, this would be brought to a shuddering halt—a third of economic activity in that sector, a third of jobs under threat from the Leader of the Opposition.

It is about jobs, but it is also about investing in schools. If we look at what has been funded up to the end of April 2010, Building the Education Revolution has funded 3,052 new classrooms, 3,017 libraries, 2,822 multipurpose halls, 289 science centres, 179 language centres and 78 dual-purpose centres. In northern New South Wales, about which I am asked, in the electorate of Cowper Building the Education Revolution has funded 23 libraries, 30 new classrooms, 17 multipurpose halls, four language centres and five science centres. All of this is under threat from the Leader of the Opposition. When he was asked whether, as Prime Minister, he would guarantee the same quantum of funding for Building the Education Revolution he said, in the language of the Leader of the Opposition—"you can tell that—'Well, look, um, ah, I’m not going to give you that absolute commitment.' That is the gospel truth for, ‘There will be cutbacks and these projects will not be delivered.'

Mr Secker—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: this goes to House of Representatives Practice on page 490 where it is considered very bad behaviour by parliamentarians to mimic other MPs.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Despite the mirth that was the response to the point made by the member for Barker, he is correct and all of the House might pay heed to the lesson that he has taught them.

Ms GILLARD—Thanks to the member for Barker for that critique of my skills—that was very impressive. Beyond these threats to projects under Building the Education Revolution, there is a threat to computers in schools. We as a government have delivered more computers, and had them installed, during the 2½ years of the life of this government than kids in years 9 to 12 had at the end of 12 years of the Howard government—300,000 installed, 210,000 at the end of 12 years of government. What this means in the electorate of Cowper is that we funded 5,241 new computers and delivered 3,972 of them. If the Leader of the Opposition has his way, there will be no more computers for kids in that area.

Then when it comes to trade training centres, of course we have been benefiting schools around the country—230 projects benefiting 732 schools. But if the Leader of the Opposition has his way then 1,800 schools will not be able to benefit from our Trade Training Centres in Schools Program, getting real skills for real jobs. What that means in Cowper is that, if the Leader of the Opposition had his way, the $4.5 million project benefiting Macksville High School and the trade training centre there, which is being participated in by Bowraville Central and Nambucca Heads high schools, would not go ahead. The $1.5 million project for Bellingen High School’s trade training centre would not go ahead—real kids losing out on real opportunities because of the conduct of the Leader of the Opposition. This is extreme policy making aimed at education, aimed at kids. I am still looking for a member of the opposition who will stand up for their local community and tell the Leader of the Opposition he is wrong. The member for Cowper most certainly is not one.

Budget

Ms JULIE BISHOP (3.23 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the Deloitte WA share index, underpinned by Western
Australian mining companies, which fell 12.6 per cent in May, significantly more than any other major international share index. Does the Prime Minister accept that he was wrong when he claimed the supertax on mining had no impact on the share values of mining companies and on the retirement incomes of millions of Australians?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for Curtin for her question and I inform the House that I am advised that since the end of April the US market has fallen by eight per cent, the UK market by 6 per cent, the euro markets by five per cent, Hong Kong by five per cent, Japan by nearly 11 per cent, and Australia has been down by just over six per cent. That is the first point. Can I also go to the second point, which I partly referred to before: Australia’s resources stocks have been down over the same period by about five per cent. That is less than the overall ASX. Let’s just be very clear about that.

Furthermore—and I draw this to the honourable member’s attention, because facts are a problem when you are running a fear campaign—over the same period of time the Canadian resource stocks have been down by about six per cent and Australian stocks by five per cent. Can I just say to those opposite: I do not think there is a debate in Canada at the moment about tax reform in the mining industry. I would suggest to her that she actually pay attention to factual analysis of what is happening around the world. The member for North Sydney sought before, frankly, to mislead the House in terms of key facts concerning projects. We have had that now from the member for Curtin—

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Prime Minister has just stated that one of the members of the opposition has sought to mislead the House. I think it would help the good order of this House if he withdrew that comment.

The SPEAKER—Within the practices of the House, statements like that have been made. People with memories, who have been here quite a while, know that a substantive motion is required if other phrases are used.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, am I to take it that it is okay for the Prime Minister to say that the member for North Sydney was misleading the House?

Mr McMullan—That’s what you used to do.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance has helped me out because I was going to personalise it by saying a former Leader of the House should know that those who have been responsible on either side for the business would know that the practice of this House is that the expression ‘mislead’ is quite often used. It has been the practice of this House that, if the accusation has been that a member has deliberately misled the House, that requires a substantive motion. That is the way in which this House has conducted its business in the past. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr RUDD—Thank you, Mr Speaker—
Mr Hockey—Bring on the motion.
Mr RUDD—If Joe’s feelings are hurt, of course I will withdraw. Can I also say in response to what the member for Curtin was saying before that I draw her attention to a statement made quite recently by the chief currency strategist of the CBA who, when talking about share market movements in recent times, said:
These are sort of factors that have been going on which are not at all related to the mining tax. And just to further push that point home, some of the shares of the big offshore mining companies such as Vale—

Mr Hunt—Vale!

Mr Rudd—I defer to the Portuguese pronunciation skills of those opposite. Can I say therefore that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has sought to construct an argument based around the share market impact of mining stocks. Firstly, as far as the Australian index is concerned, it has generally performed better than most other comparable indexes. Secondly, in terms of our mining stocks, they have performed better than the Brazilian company Vale that I just referred to as well as the Canadian exchange, and I referred to those figures before.

It was very good to see the member for Curtin, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, out there engaged in her protest activities the other day in Perth. It was a bit a like protest by Prada I thought. You had the Deputy Leader of the Opposition out there campaigning hard in a designer type demonstration. It was good. It was effective. The message was heard clearly. But I would say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition: don’t let the facts get in the road of a good fear campaign.

Welfare Reform

Mr Hale (3.29 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Why is it critical that the government’s welfare reforms commence as early as possible?

Ms Macklin—I thank the member for Solomon for his question. As he knows, the government are determined to make sure we provide welfare responsibly and we are determined to also make sure that welfare encourages personal responsibility and supports people to do the right thing, especially by their children. That is why our major welfare reforms, commencing in the Northern Territory, are critical. Income management will be used to fight passive welfare and also to increase personal responsibility. What we want to see is people making sure that their children go to school, and we want to see young people getting into work and training. We intend to do everything we possibly can to fight passive welfare and to link income support to school attendance and to study and work. These requirements are not in place at the current time.

Our reforms that are currently before the Senate extend the benefits of income management to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are in need of financial protection and better financial structure in their lives. The reforms that we intend to put in place are non-discriminatory. They will apply across the Northern Territory, in the towns—places like Tennant Creek and Katherine—as well as in the suburbs of Darwin and Alice Springs.

From our point of view, income management is a very useful and important tool for protecting vulnerable people, particularly for protecting children. It makes sure that welfare payments are spent on the essentials of life—things like food, clothing and rent—and not on alcohol and drugs. I am certainly very aware that there are very strong views held on welfare reform, but where is the dignity of a life spent on welfare? Where is the dignity for children in not being properly fed or clothed? And I have to say there is no dignity at all in teaching the next generation that a welfare cheque is the best that they can expect from their lives. So, from our point of view, income management is a vital measure to protect the basic rights and to make sure the most vulnerable in our community are protected so that they can have the same
sorts of aspirations that other Australians aspire to: a decent job, a decent home, a safe and healthy life.

We do have a number of people calling for this legislation to get through the Senate as quickly as possible. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance in the Northern Territory are just two calling for the passage of these reforms in the coming fortnight. The legislation in the Senate at the moment also reinstates the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act in the Northern Territory. So it would be completely irresponsible to delay these reforms, which are designed to protect and assist vulnerable people. We want to see this legislation debated and agreed to in the Senate in the next fortnight so that vulnerable people in the Northern Territory are able to get the help that they need and that they have been waiting for for too long.

Medicare

Mr Oakeshott (3.33 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, more than 30,000 Australians who had Medicare claims for cataract surgery between 1 November last year and 1 February this year are hundreds of dollars out of pocket due to the repeated failure of this place and the Senate to pass proposed changes to the Medicare rebate. Prime Minister, will you review the case of 72-year-old Port Macquarie pensioner Patricia Parker, who through no fault of her own is $758 out of pocket after falling victim to this political episode, with your consideration of compensation for out-of-pocket expenses for her and the 30,000 other Australians unfairly affected?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for Lyne for his question. On the question of the constituent to which he refers, can I say that we will obviously examine the circumstances surrounding that constituent. I am advised on my way to the dispatch box by the health minister that there is some gap between one set of arrangements and another, and this may well have affected an individual concerned.

Mr Dutton—So the answer is no!

Ms Roxon—You interject!

The Speaker—Order, the member for Dickson and the minister! The Prime Minister is answering the question.

Mr Rudd—On the matters raised by the honourable member, we will examine them further and I will have the health minister respond to him direct.

Health

Mr Sullivan (3.35 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Will the minister update the House on the rollout of the government’s GP superclinics to improve primary care services? What risks are there to these initiatives, particularly for the communities in the north of Brisbane?

Ms Roxon—I thank the member for Longman for his question. It is a very good question across the country, not just in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. But, of course, one of the biggest risks does currently live in the northern suburbs of Brisbane, although he is trying to get a seat somewhere else, and that is the member for Dickson. He, as the shadow health spokesperson, and the Leader of the Opposition of course do not support GP superclinics. He has not bothered to turn up and see that the improved share of services being provided to his community in Strathpine is actually something that has been welcomed with open arms. But let me go back a few steps, because there is some other good news about the superclinics program across the country which I think members would be interested in. I know the member for Gilmore, who does not appear to
be in the House at the moment, would be interested to know that the new electorate of Gilmore but the current electorate of Throsby is soon to benefit from the Shell Cove superclinic. I was there today with the member for Throsby and the member for Cunningham to turn the first sod for this superclinic.

Before those opposite interject, I would like to ask whether anyone in this House, other than, of course, the two members who were with me, know how many doctors there currently are in Shell Cove, Shellharbour Village and Flinders. When this superclinic is open early next year, it will provide GP services, nursing services and allied health services, and currently in all of the three surrounding suburbs there is not a single doctor. This is the legacy that was left to us by the previous government. This has been turned around by our investments in superclinics, but unfortunately it is slated by the opposition to be closed. So future clinics that will be invested in, that were announced in the budget, have already been put on the Leader of the Opposition’s cutting list, which we know is something that the Leader of the Opposition has such a bad reputation for.

But it is not just the Shell Cove superclinic. The Parliamentary Secretary for Health and the member for Kingston last week inspected the start of work at the $25 million Noarlunga GP Plus Superclinic, which will be offering multidisciplinary care with extended operating hours. Last Wednesday I was pleased to inspect, with the member for Hasluck, the plans for the $10 million Midland GP superclinic. I inform those opposite that there was a very enthusiastic—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Dickson is warned!

**Ms ROXON**—The member for Dickson is not keen for me to finish this sentence because he is aware that the state Liberal MP for the area, Frank Alban, was there with the member for Hasluck and me to inspect the plans, because of course this is a joint project between the Western Australian Liberal government and our government. In fact, Mr Frank Alban, the local member, threatened—and I will quote his somewhat colourful language—quite serious bodily harm to any Liberal who dared to question the future of the clinic. This Midland superclinic is going to be in the old railway yards, and he said that any Liberal who wanted to oppose the clinic would be ‘hanging from the rafters of the railway yards’. I would not like to go that far, but I do think that he is clearly making a point that people who understand the services that are being provided in the community support them. Unfortunately, those opposite do not.

Now I want to talk little bit more about the Strathpine superclinic, which is of course part of the question asked of me by the member for Longman. Since January, when this clinic was opened, to 26 May—the latest data that we have—there have been more than 17,000 presentations at this clinic: 11,300 GP consultations, 1,800 pathology consultations and 3,900 allied and nursing consultations. You have to wonder, given these extraordinary numbers, how it is that the member for Dickson, on a margin of just 217 votes, does not think it a good idea to provide thousands of services to his constituents in Strathpine. There are not only six new GPs at the clinics; there is a new female GP—

*Mr Dutton interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Dickson will resume his seat. For somebody
who has had something like seven or eight one-hour dismissals from the chamber, I cannot understand why the member for Dickson thinks that he is able to do what he just did. The minister has the call.

Ms ROXON—Yes, Mr Speaker. I think that is a question that is being asked in the electorate of Dickson.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume her seat. I am in danger of giving one of my lectures that people get upset about. I do not believe that this is a debating time, but I think that if people were to observe the amount of debate that I allow in questions from those on my left they would know that it is to balance the amount of debate that has always been contained in answers—always—and some of those with ministerial experience on the front bench on my left know that full well. The minister has the call and those members on my left know that the type of question contained by way of debate in an answer can in no way be responded to within the standing orders.

Ms ROXON—as I said, there is a reason that the opposition are so touchy about this: they have slated GP superclinics for their health cuts. The Leader of the Opposition has a record for pulling a billion dollars out of our hospitals. He already has on his list of the next cuts GP superclinics, investments in primary care infrastructure, e-health, and now also diabetes.

The member for Dickson has not had the decency to turn up at the superclinic in his electorate to see what services they are operating. The question that the member for Dickson and the Liberal Party have to confront next is: when we open applications for GP clinics across the country to be able to apply to expand their facilities—and in the seat of Dickson there are 145 doctors who will be able to apply for grants of up to half a million dollars—will the member for Dickson be writing to those GPs informing them of this great program available to assist in the expansion of their services that can support their constituents, or will he be writing perhaps more honestly to them and telling them—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will bring her answer to a conclusion.

Ms ROXON—that this support is not provided? It is important because I was asked about the support for primary care services in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. There are doctors in the northern suburbs of Brisbane who want to expand their practices, who want to be able to employ nurses and allied health professionals, and our government is making a program available where up to half a million dollars is available for those practices. The Liberal Party oppose it and the member for Dickson needs to spend a little bit more time concentrating on getting a fair share for his constituents rather than just worrying about his own shares—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will conclude her answer.

Ms ROXON—and that would be a better investment of his time here in this House.

Education Funding

Mrs HULL (3.44 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education. Is the minister aware that the Brungle Primary School in my electorate was allocated $250,000 under her school hall stimulus program? Is the minister also aware that the school obtained an independent quote to build a new library for $75,000? Instead, they have been told they must use a state-appointed contractor to build a library which is smaller and costs $250,000. Does the minister agree that this bungle in Brungle could have been avoided had the school self-managed their project?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question and her very clever alliteration.
That is an innovation for question time. I am aware that these claims have been raised about Brungle. I am aware that they received some publicity. I am also aware that there is a question about the quotes as opposed to the actual costs involved for Brungle. What I would say to the member is: yes, I am aware that an investigation has been conducted into the claims about the quotes versus the actualities, and I am very happy to provide the member with details should she want further information. The school, as I understand it, is in the electorate of Eden-Monaro, so obviously the member for that electorate in this place will be very well aware of the matter. I can also say to her that, should she or any member of the school community believe that further work needs to be done on this question, they can refer the matter to the Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce, which has been set up with the purpose of looking at these questions. It is led by a leading Australian businessperson who is of course travelling to schools as we speak and dealing with any questions schools may have.

I remind the member—and she knows this from her own local school community; I am very well aware that she does—that, if we look across the Building the Education Revolution program, we see it has involved 9,500 schools and 24,000 projects. There are many, many school communities, including in the member’s own electorate, who are delighted with their project, delighted with the investment and delighted with the support that it has provided to local jobs, to the extent that there are concerns that there be a clear process for addressing these issues through the implementation task force. I also remind the member that, if we had determined to go the way that she indicated with her vote in this House and that the Leader of the Opposition indicated with his vote in this House and not provided economic stimulus, we would see a couple of hundred thousand more Australians unemployed and we would not see one dollar spent on the schools in her electorate. I know the member who has asked this question reasonably well, and I do not genuinely believe that she wanted to see zero invested in her local schools.

Workplace Relations

Ms LIVERMORE (3.48 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the minister outline to the House the impact of workplace relations policies on workers in female dominated industries like the retail and hospitality sectors?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. I know that she is deeply concerned with fairness in Australian workplaces, particularly for Australian women. She has asked me about how workplace relations systems can support fairness for working women. Of course you can support fairness for working women if you have a decent safety net that cannot be stripped away, if you have a proper pay equity principle that allows equal pay cases to be taken and appropriately prosecuted, if you have a low-paid bargaining stream which enables predominantly female dominated industries to enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining, and if you have an independent umpire and a regular minimum wages case which means that minimum wages are fairly adjusted, as we have recently seen from Fair Work Australia. You can support working women if you allow appropriate flexibilities at work, underpinned by the safety net; you can support working women if you protect good working women, women who have proved to be hard workers, from unfair dismissal. Of course the Fair Work system does all of that.

Australians remember very vividly Work Choices—a system of workplace relations
supported by those opposite that did not give any of these protections to working women, that enabled the pay of working Australians to be cut back with no compensation. Let us quickly go through the statistics. Under the Australian workplace agreements that the Liberal Party used to rejoice in, we recall the statistics that 63 per cent saw their penalty rates cut, 52 per cent saw shift work cut, 51 per cent saw overtime loadings cut, 46 per cent saw public holiday pay cut and 22 per cent were provided with no pay rise over the life of the agreement, some for up to five years. This was bad for working people but it was particularly bad for working women. Let us look at the statistics in female dominated industries. Research in 2007 found in retail, obviously female dominated, that casual and part-time sales assistants working a 12-hour week lost on average 12 per cent of their earnings if they were on an Australian workplace agreement—a truly amazing statistic. Permanent part-time retail workers on the same hours lost 18 per cent of their earnings on Australian workplace agreements. In hospitality, once again a female dominated industry, it was the same story. Workers on Australian workplace agreements suffered losses of between six and 12 per cent of their income—rip-off after rip-off, particularly for working women.

Research on Victorian workers under Work Choices found that if you were a median worker on an Australian Workplace Agreement you earned 16.3 per cent less compared to the median worker on a collective agreement. If you were a woman, you earned 18.7 per cent less than a woman on a collective agreement. For the most disadvantaged groups, female labourers and related workers, AWA workers were paid a whopping 26 per cent less than similar women on collective agreements. These are stunning statistics about the rip-off that Work Choices was for working women. What that rip-off means is that women went to work and could not complain because of the threat of unfair dismissal; they had absolutely no right to take an unfair dismissal claim in almost all Australian businesses—you just had to cop it, even though that pay reduction might mean that you could no longer pay your mortgage, even though that pay reduction might mean that meeting the ordinary household bills to put food on the table was really putting stress and strain on you.

Many Australians might believe that these are the horror stories of the Work Choices past but we need to remind ourselves these could be the contemporary stories of the future if the Leader of the Opposition has his way. He is lock, stock and barrel committed to Work Choices. He is turning his head because he does not want Australians to know the truth. He is on the record, time after time, as a devotee of Work Choices. Even in his budget reply speech he endorsed the central elements that made Work Choices the rip-off that it was. The message for working women is very clear. When they look at the Leader of the Opposition they see a man with a track record of statements that would concern women, including working women, and they see a man committed to industrial relations extremism and committed to the return of Work Choices.

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

DOCUMENTS

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

That the House take note of the following documents:

Air Passenger Ticket Levy (Collection) Act 2001—Report to the Commonwealth made under
section 24 for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Government advertising—Granting of an exemption from guidelines on information and advertising campaigns by Australian Government departments and agencies—Exchange of letters between Mr Swan, Treasurer and Senator Ludwig, Special Minister of State and Cabinet Secretary, May 2010 [3].

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Whaling

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts) (3.54 pm)—by leave—Next week, I shall attend the 62nd annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission, the IWC, a meeting that is shaping up to be a watershed in the conservation of whales in the 21st century. This meeting will consider a proposal to sanction commercial whaling—a proposal which Australia believes is deeply defective.

As I have said previously, the government has carefully considered this proposal and has concluded that it falls well short of anything Australia could support. We strongly support efforts to find a negotiated solution to differences over whaling. The process has yielded some good results, and there are some features in the proposal which has been put forward by the Chair and Co-chair of the IWC which are worthy of discussion. We commend the chairs for their efforts.

Those who would support the chairs’ proposal have emphasised that all sides must compromise if agreement is to be reached. But this is no compromise—the current proposal is patently unbalanced in favour of whaling nations. And the critical question is: if the proposal is passed as it stands what will the IWC have agreed? The answer is it will have agreed to legitimise commercial whaling for 10 years at quotas which will sanction the killing of almost 13,000 whales. It will have agreed to hunting on vulnerable and endangered whale species and on humpbacks in the Northern Hemisphere. It will have sanctioned the killing of whales in the Southern Ocean—an IWC-agreed sanctuary. It will have set whaling quotas using ad hoc measures rather than IWC-agreed scientific procedures. And it will have put off, to yet another working group, efforts to definitively address issues of critical importance to Australia, including so-called ‘scientific’ whaling.

If such a deal were to go through, Australians would need to resign themselves to watching the slaughter of whales in the Southern Ocean, year after year, over the next decade. We may protest, but the IWC would have made it so. The proponents of the compromise argue that this will be a transitional arrangement, a truce between whaling and antiwhaling countries, that will hopefully lead to a permanent settlement of the contentious issues.

Australia also seeks a resolution of differences on whaling, and would support reform that enabled the commission to achieve substantial progress through consensus and cooperation. But a bad deal, particularly if driven through the commission on a split vote, is unlikely to achieve the reconciliation we all desire. The proponents claim that only an agreement allowing a return to commercial whaling will save the IWC. But their characterisation of the organisation as a dysfunctional body powerless to control whaling is an overly negative view of the IWC which ignores the organisation’s considerable strengths.

The IWC remains in need of reform, but there is a bright future for the body if it can move further in the direction of a modern conservation oriented organisation. Charac-
terising the IWC as dysfunctional ignores the IWC’s recent initiatives such as collaborative non-lethal whale research, progress in developing conservation management plans, efforts to address whale entanglement and ship strikes, and the promotion of sustainable whale-watching industries. Australia is proud to be playing a strong role in these initiatives. Most importantly, the IWC is the custodian of the global moratorium on commercial whaling, which remains the single most important contributing factor to improved whale conservation in the world today.

Many would argue that the IWC chairs’ proposal would be preferable to the status quo. Unfortunately, this proposal would in fact wind back much of the progress we have made since the implementation of the moratorium. It would see a return to block whaling quotas, which were effectively abandoned by the IWC as a failed management tool decades ago. It would undo much of the hard work undertaken over many years in the commission to embed rigorous science as the basis for IWC management decisions.

It also does not do enough to move towards an end to commercial whaling. Even if one just looks at numbers, the improvement on the status quo would be unimpressive, merely a reduction of only 175 whales killed globally in each of the first five years of the 10-year agreement, and 380 a year thereafter. Three thousand whales would still be killed in the Southern Ocean sanctuary. Sadly, there is no guarantee that after the proposed 10-year agreement expires, the number of whales hunted would not return to existing levels or even higher than the status quo. As a country which seeks the eventual elimination of all commercial whaling, including so-called ‘scientific’ whaling, this would be unacceptable to Australia. Critically, the proposal is mute as to what happens after 10 years. There are no commitments that any conservation gains will be maintained, no commitment that the loopholes in the convention will be addressed, no commitment that the proposed South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary will continue and no commitment that additional species of whales will not be targeted for hunting.

Commercial whaling under the moratorium is considered by many analysts to be a dying industry. Consumer demand is very low and whaling in most cases is propped up by government subsidies. Annual whale kill quotas set by the three whaling nations are rarely met, and there is little market for the whales that are caught. Much of the meat sits unsold in warehouses. International trade in whale meat is banned. Left to its own, it is an industry that should and would die a natural death. Given this state of affairs, it is obvious that for the IWC to authorise large-scale whaling in the Southern Ocean and whaling on endangered species would not amount to any improvement on the status quo and may, indeed, entrench whaling for years to come. I will not, however, be travelling to Morocco as a defender of the status quo. Australia will attend the meeting with clear goals to achieve further conservation oriented reform.

In Australia’s view the role of science is paramount for the IWC to be an effective 21st century organisation. Consistent with the government’s objectives of ending unilateral scientific whaling and bringing scientific research under the auspices of a reformed commission, on 6 December 2008, I announced that the Australian government will invest a total of $32 million over six years in non-lethal research and other initiatives to combat so-called ‘scientific’ whaling. This investment includes:

i. $14 million working with nations around the world in the Southern Ocean Research Partnership—the largest of its kind in the world—supporting a series of innovative surveys in the Southern Ocean using air-
craft and ships to deploy the latest non-lethal research techniques, as well as tracking whales along Australian coasts; and I recently announced more than $668,000 of non-lethal whale and dolphin research funding.

ii. $14.6 million for the Australian Marine Mammal Centre, co-located at Hobart’s Australian Antarctic Division, to provide competitive grants for applied, strategic, non-lethal research and related activities.

The Southern Ocean Research Partnership, backed by the Australian Marine Mammal Centre, will deliver valuable, non-lethal research on an international scale and confirm once again that whales do not need to be killed in the name of science.

Australia has adopted a positive approach in IWC negotiations. We have not simply sat back and criticised the ideas of others. We have been constructive. We have argued for and delivered increased provisions on conservation and the protection of whales from new threats like climate change and ocean pollution. Ahead of the IWC annual meeting, we also developed a strong Australian proposal for the future of the IWC. Australia’s nine-point proposal, which I released on 25 February this year, seeks robust conservation measures including the complete phasing-out of whaling in the Southern Ocean within five years, an end to whaling in all sanctuaries, and an immediate reduction to zero in the take of vulnerable and endangered species and populations.

We are heartened by the number of conservation-minded countries, who, on the eve of this crucial IWC conference, are declaring themselves forcefully for whale conservation and against such practices as whaling in the Southern Ocean sanctuary and whaling on vulnerable and threatened species. I particularly want to applaud the efforts of the Latin American countries, including Brazil and Mexico, and many European countries, particularly the United Kingdom and Germany—and there are others—to ensure the outcome from this crucial meeting of the International Whaling Commission does not undo all the conservation gains of the past two decades. We will keep working with these and other countries to promote genuine IWC reform and improved protection for whales globally.

Perhaps the whaling countries will be receptive to this. But, unfortunately, this is expressed as our hope rather than our expectation. The fact is that to date, the response of the whaling countries has not been positive. Recent statements by whaling countries in the commission have provided Australia with little cause for hope that our serious commitment to conservation of the world’s whales will be reflected in any IWC compromise agreement. In particular there seems to be little chance that whaling in the Southern Ocean will be brought to an end or that the misuse of the article VIII scientific whaling provision of the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling will be definitively addressed. The government has always said if we could not find a diplomatic resolution to differences over ‘scientific’ whaling, we would pursue legal action. For this reason, Australia has initiated legal action in the International Court of Justice in The Hague against Japanese ‘scientific’ whaling in the Southern Ocean.

Australia has been involved in the discussions on the future of the IWC because we believe the commission has a robust future as a conservation focused organisation. We do not subscribe to the view that the only way to ensure the organisation’s future is for it to return to its past, policing the development of a heavily subsidised whaling industry. The Rudd government believes that in the 21st century the commission must move forward to embrace a contemporary approach to the
conservation of living resources; one that acknowledges the dramatic increase in whale watching as an economic activity which now dwarfs whaling as a source of income for a growing number of countries around the world; one that recognises that you do not need to kill whales to learn about them; and one that acknowledges the extraordinary level of public concern about our treatment of the world’s whales.

Australia will continue to play an active and committed role in the forthcoming IWC discussions. We will continue to engage with the other 87 IWC member nations, including many former whaling nations like Australia, to convince the final three remaining whaling nations that whale watching, not whale hunting, is the way of the future.

We are in the final days before the next commission meeting. I note the multiple different positions that those opposite have had on this issue—particularly confusing, given the recent comment by the member for Flinders, who described the commission as ‘corrupt’. The government calls on those opposite to support our actions at next week’s IWC meeting.

Australia is a global leader when it comes to the conservation and protection of whales around the world. This government has done more on this issue than has ever been the case in the past. We remain resolutely opposed to commercial and so-called scientific whaling. With our conservation-minded colleagues both in Latin America and in key European nations we have been leading the fight in the commission to prevent the legitimisation of commercial whaling and the undermining of the moratorium, and we will continue that fight next week at the IWC meeting in Agadir in Morocco.

**PAID PARENTAL LEAVE SCHEME**

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (4.08 pm)—by leave—I thank the member for Flinders for allowing this short interruption. For the information of honourable members, I present a petition on paid parental leave entitled ‘Time to deliver’. This morning the Prime Minister, the Minister for the Status of Women and I received this petition from 25,000 Australians calling on all members of parliament to support a paid parental leave scheme operational from 1 January next year. This petition has been coordinated by the ACTU and is a rollcall of all those Australians who have been waiting decades for a national paid parental leave scheme. Some 25,000 Australians have signed the petition and have signed up to the scheme that we have designed. Retail workers; nurses; teachers; university students; electricians; construction workers; workers in hospitality, finance, forestry, local government and the airlines; workers on the waterfront; rail, tram and bus drivers; schoolkids; mums; dads; and grandparents—the list goes on—are calling on their members of parliament to give Australian working families access to a fair national paid parental leave scheme.

The trade union movement in Australia has been at the forefront of the battle for paid parental leave for a long time. All of it is in the best interests of babies and their parents. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Sharan Burrow, the ACTU President, for her determination and leadership. We expect we are now days away from achieving a very significant step forward for Australian working families—a national government funded paid parental leave scheme that will give thousands of Australian families more time with their babies, a scheme that is fair to families and fair to businesses, a scheme
that, as this petition shows, Australian families want.

It is a great privilege to have been able to table this petition with the support of the member for Sydney, the Minister for the Status of Women. We know that this is in the best interests of Australian working families and their children.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georgas)—This document will now be referred to the Standing Committee on Petitions for consideration.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Whaling

Consideration resumed.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (4.11 pm)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Hunt speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 14 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (4.12 pm)—The coalition support clearly, simply, absolutely a total ban on scientific whaling wherever it may occur. We support a total ban on commercial whaling wherever it may occur. There is no justification for scientific or commercial whaling in the 21st century. That relic of history has passed. That moment in time has gone. We now seek to ensure a global regime for protecting these great and majestic marine mammals, whether they are humpbacks, minkes or other whales, that find themselves threatened not just by current practices but by at this moment the potential resumption of commercial whaling. It is a trend, a movement and a proposal which we will oppose clearly and absolutely.

The coalition also support and propose international legal action against scientific whaling. We want to make sure, of course, that it is appropriate and effective, but our support is clear on this issue. We know that the International Whaling Commission is subject to corrupt practices and there has been a blind eye turned abroad and domestically to those acts and practices of corruption which go to the heart of the way the International Whaling Commission operates. I am sad to report that fact, but it is critical that we do so.

I want to set out three propositions today. Firstly, the International Whaling Commission in its current form is corrupt in its constitution and unacceptable in its practices. Secondly, we support international legal action, of course, on the basis that it is appropriate and effective. Thirdly, we have a very clear, strong and proud history, having set up the ban in 1980 on whaling in Australian waters and the Australian Antarctic Whale Sanctuary in 2000 under different coalition governments. That is our position. Our pledge is to fight consistently and persistently against commercial and scientific whaling in any form in any place and in every form in every place.

Let me make these points: there are elements of bipartisanship about the means and the objectives but there are points of disagreement about the effectiveness and the intent in the way in which this campaign has been carried on over the last 2½ years. First, it is absolutely clear that the Australian government has turned a blind eye over the last 2½ years to the corruption which has addled the heart of the International Whaling Commission. Let it be known that four years ago, as it became increasingly clear that the processes and practices of the IWC had been distorted and were no longer acceptable, the then coalition minister for the environment, Senator Ian Campbell, said on 22 June 2006
that there was corruption in the IWC practices and that there was clear evidence of vote buying.

I do not know whether he was the first such minister around the world to make those allegations but I do know that he made them loudly, clearly and courageously. In fact he has gone on in his post-parliamentary career to be committed to the practice of eradicating scientific and commercial whaling from the world in the 21st century. I quote his words because they were made four years ago:

"I think that some of the practices within the IWC over many years could be called corrupt," he said.

"It’s been happening in the last couple of years, these sorts of practices have been going on for many years."

What we see here is, very clearly, a strong and courageous statement that what was occurring in the IWC had to be exposed. Instead over the last 2½ years this body, which has been addled to its heart, has been used as a diversion from the fact that the government was in prolonged breach of its multiple pre-election promises to take Japanese whaling to the international court. We have seen the IWC used as a cover to imply action when in fact there has been inaction. Worse than that, there has been a blind eye turned to the practices which have so addled this international body.

We have seen that Australia has been a handmaiden to what is increasingly emerging as a shabby deal. The minister and I are in agreement that what is on the table now will see 13,000 whales slaughtered, will put humpbacks at risk, will see the risk of commercial whaling in the Southern Ocean and will see the continuation of scientific whaling. And Australia was at the table as the deal was being crafted. It was only after reports revealed that Australia was part of the negotiations which ultimately led to this deal that the government was forced to back away from it. They were part and parcel of an approach which would have allowed commercial whaling. We now see that the Australian government was caught out. They were handmaidens to a shabby deal and they made Australia complicit in developing a shabby and unacceptable deal for Australians of good faith everywhere.

What is about to occur in Morocco is a critical moment. We face a terrible risk that the more than two decades of international moratorium will be overturned and that commercial whaling will find approval. Australia must be successful in opposing this shabby deal. I am hopeful that that will be the case and I hope, sincerely, that we are not being softened-up for a defeat. I can only believe that there are enough countries of good faith to defeat what must surely be deemed as a retrograde step with regard to whaling. How have we come to this position?

The second point in relation to the International Court of Justice case is that there were five years of promises from the Australian Labor Party and from the minister in question. Going back to 20 May 2005, the then shadow foreign affairs spokesperson and now Prime Minister promised that they would take action, promised that there should be immediate action, promised on multiple occasions that on coming to government a Labor Party would take immediate action. What we now know of course is that there was no immediate action. We saw a series of different breaches. The Oceanic Viking, which had been promised, was delayed and delayed before making a brief tour to the south. The flights, which were to oversee the Japanese whaling ship, never materialised until the last moment. At that point there was no direct contact with any of the active whaling fleet and they were simply
spotters. In other words the promises were never delivered.

Most significantly this year, as the government’s promise was postponed in February by the Prime Minister until after the next election, they came under increasing public pressure to finally live up to their promises and to live up to that which they had told the Australian people was a sacred duty. Firstly, on 16 March 2010 the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julie Bishop, wrote to the foreign affairs minister and made it clear that the coalition saw no impediment to immediate action and that we need not wait until after the election. As long as the advice showed a reasonable chance of success the coalition would support immediate action. It was this pressure which was fundamental in causing the government to walk away from its decision to put the promise for whaling action back until after the next election.

Secondly, we know that on 22 May the bell tolled. It was made clear in media reports that the government had not provisioned a single dollar, whether through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Attorney-General’s Department or the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, for an international legal case on whaling. The government was caught out. It was that measure, along with the desire six days later on 28 May to cover up the $38 million mining ad campaign—$38 million for a mining tax advertising campaign in direct breach of a pre-election promise. It was made within eight minutes, so I am advised, of the announcement of this court case. It has every appearance of being a diversion.

Can the government advise why they have ignored the advice of Professor Don Rothwell and chosen the ICJ route rather than the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea? We are open-minded on that question. We seek genuine advice on that. We have asked for briefings. I know that in January the Deputy Leader of the Opposition wrote to the then Acting Prime Minister seeking briefings. We await those briefings and we await a briefing on why the ICJ was chosen over the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

I conclude with the coalition’s history and position. Our history is very clear. It was a coalition government which in 1980 brought the Whale Protection Act into force, ending the practice of whaling in Australian waters. It was a coalition government under John Howard that implemented the Australian Antarctic Whale Sanctuary, which took form and place and existence on 16 July 2000. A future coalition government has a very simple five-point plan on whaling. Firstly, we will pursue a total ban on commercial and scientific whaling. Secondly, we will pursue, and we support, international legal action to ensure that scientific whaling is eradicated. Thirdly, we support and will pursue a global whale sanctuary. Fourthly, we will implement a whale recovery program—and we will have further details on that as we approach the election. Finally, we will prosecute through diplomatic action an effective case for ending whaling at the grassroots level in Japan, something which has been ignored by this government. Those are the things we will do.

For those reasons, we believe Australia must be at the forefront of fighting against commercial whaling and scientific whaling, wherever it occurs. We believe that the government turned a blind eye to the corruption which has addled the heart of the International Whaling Commission. We urge them
to fight against every element of the proposed shabby deal in Morocco. We will stand against whaling wherever it occurs, whenever it occurs.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Rudd Government: Immigration and Border Protection Policies

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Geogginas)—Mr Speaker has received a letter from the honourable member for Cook proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The rising cost of the Government’s failed immigration and border protection policies.

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 MORRISON (Cook) (4.26 pm)—Today’s editorial in the Sydney Daily Telegraph highlights the matter of public importance before the House today. It says:

The constant arrival of claimed asylum seekers off Australia’s northern coastline comes with a dreadful toll. More than 150 men, women and children, lured by the promises of people-smugglers and a belief that Australia offers easy sanctuary, have drowned at sea since 2008.

This is a cost rarely mentioned in considering the ongoing issue of asylum seekers. And then there is the financial cost which, while of lesser concern, is now becoming outrageous.

It goes on to say:

… the Rudd Government seems unable or unwilling to take serious action to stop it.

Inaction is driving the various costs involved in this higher by the day.

There is nothing humane about policies that encourage people to risk their lives in the hands of people smugglers. People die on boats. This is the inconvenient truth of the asylum seekers debate and the reality for at least hundreds who have perished at sea.

People smugglers are not the modern-day equivalent of Oscar Schindler, as some in the public debate romantically suggest. Today’s people smugglers are criminal syndicates. They put others’ lives at risk for their own profit. If the Prime Minister spent as much time and energy in this House trying to destroy the profits of people smugglers as he does trying to tax the profits of our minerals sector, then perhaps things would be different. But they are not different today. Today we have boats arriving at a rate on average of three per week. This compares to an average of just three per year over the last six years of the Howard government. More people have arrived this month than arrived in total during the last six years of the Howard government once our full suite of measures was in place.

In fact, we have had more people arrive illegally by boat in the first five months of this year than in the 13 years following the end of the Vietnam War. Contrary to popular myth, large numbers of people and boats did not arrive on our shores following the Vietnam War. The boats and their passengers were diverted to offshore processing centres, in places like Galang in Indonesia, as part of a plan supported by the Fraser government. During this genuine regional crisis, Indochinese asylum seekers were processed offshore and resettled in the same way as they were processed at Nauru and Manus Island and resettled under the policies of the Howard government. In this context, Malcolm Fraser was indeed a pioneer of offshore processing.

Whatever our critics might argue, the Australian public know that John Howard and his government stopped the flow of boats. They have now returned, under this government’s failed policies, at an unprecedented
rate of arrival. Under the Howard government’s policies, people were no longer risking their lives on boats, as they had previously. People smugglers were no longer earning the superprofits they are today. In fact, they were not earning superprofits or profits at all at that time. Our courts were no longer jammed with endless appeals from those seeking to have the rejection of their asylum claims overturned and to have their stay extended. Our detention population had fallen by the time we left office to just 449 people, of whom only four had arrived by boat, and just 21 children were being detained.

Detention centres such as Curtin and Baxter were closed. New state-of-the-art facilities were built on Christmas Island to cope with the modest arrivals anticipated under the coalition government’s policies—not the policy failures of this government. The coalition introduced reforms to remove children from formal detention and to process health, identity and security checks in parallel with refugee status determination. Those reforms made detention more humane and significantly improved processing efficiency to reduce the time people spent in detention. Those reforms remain coalition policy. The Howard government was confronted with a problem and it delivered a solution. This was done in the face of global asylum applications which at that time were more than 50 per cent higher than they are today.

Sadly, the number of refugees and people seeking asylum around the world remains high today. Of the 10½ million people around the world who are refugees—or the 10.4 million, I should say, having just seen the latest report for 2009, which is slightly less—less than one per cent will receive a resettlement in a third country such as Australia. This is a genuinely unique and very precious opportunity that is on offer to a very small number of people.

Throughout the coalition’s time in government, we maintained a strong resettlement program and we remain committed to this program today. We are still the most generous country per capita in terms of resettling refugees around the world and we boast, as we have for many years, of one of the best resettlement programs anywhere in the world. But, in contrast to the coalition’s policy, the Prime Minister’s policy serves to provide these places to those who seek to gain places by an illegal mode of entry, displacing those who have come by legal means and who have sought their asylum from offshore places in refugee camps. Those who have come by an illegal method have effectively taken the place of those who would have come by another method and who would have been given the support which is so precious and which is so given by a generous Australian community.

But what about those who come to this country by plane, as is often said? Those who arrive by air typically have a valid visa for entry and only a small minority arrive illegally without documentation. I am yet to learn of an asylum seeker who has perished on a 747 heading for Australia. That said, the coalition’s temporary protection visa policy will apply equally to those arriving illegally by air or those who have overstayed their visas and have sought asylum as it will to those who arrive illegally by boat.

The natural consequence of the Rudd government’s failed border protection policies is that our detention centres today are full again and the costs are spiralling out of control. There are now more than 3,600 people in detention. Since the abolition of temporary protection visas, the number of children being detained has grown to 452. There were, as I said earlier, 21 children being detained when the coalition left office. Under this government’s policies, there are now 452 children being detained. So do not be de-
cluded: when boats are arriving at the rate under this government, there are always going to be children coming on boats, but if no boats are coming then there will be no children coming on boats. Under this government, people are being detained in tents, in overcrowded facilities and in remote areas, including the Curtin detention centre closed by the Howard government and reopened by the Rudd government.

This year’s budget outlines a budget blowout of more than $1 billion on offshore asylum processing costs. Yet these estimates mask an even bigger blowout. The Rudd government is predicting just 2,000 arrivals in 2010-11 and in the following year 1,260. In this year’s budget they assume 4,500 people will be coming to Australia—having forecast in the budget a year ago that only 200 people would come. So far this year 5,352 people have come and the year is not out yet. This means that the government is forecasting a drop in illegal boat arrivals of more than 60 per cent in 2010-11. According to the budget presented in the House by this government a month ago, in just a few weeks time we are going to have a 60 per cent decline in the number of people coming illegally by boat to this country. It is no wonder that in estimates Senator Evans, the minister responsible, said, ‘I am not very confident that we can with any surety say that the 2,000 figure that is used for the accounting purpose in that budget paper can be supported.’ He does not believe it. He does not believe his own budget papers.

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has lost control of our borders and of his own budget. The government’s immigration budget is a work of fiction. It assumes boats will just stop coming in two weeks time, without it taking any of the hard decisions needed to deliver that outcome. Perhaps the Prime Minister believes that he can just spin these boats away like he does with all the other problems he has generated for himself. He thinks he can just spin them away out there in the 24-hour news cycle. Perhaps he thinks he is Obi-Wan Kenobi and that he can perform the Jedi mind trick on the boats. He can say, ‘This is not the country you were looking for,’ and somehow they will just go away. Maybe that is the policy, because when Senator Evans was asked in estimates about whether there was any change of policy to back up a 60 per cent fall in illegal boat arrivals, his answer was: ‘No. There’s no change of policy. We just think it’s going to happen.’ There is no need to make hard decisions, no need to do anything of a policy nature and no need to have any resolve. You put it in the budget and then the boats just go away. If only it were that easy. This side of the House knows from when we were in government how difficult these things are to achieve and what is necessary to achieve them. Not even Minister Evans believes his own budget. If boats continue to arrive at their current rate of three per week, carrying more than 600 people per month, Labor’s projected surplus will vanish, along with whatever is left of their budget credibility.

Included in these cost blow-outs is the cost of the charters. That was revealed today in the Daily Telegraph and other News Limited papers, reporting on Senate estimates. In the 10 months to January the department chartered 62 flights to and from Christmas island, at an average cost of $134,000 per flight—an increase of more than 240 per cent on the previous year. They expect to expend a further $8.1 million next year. This means ‘Air Kevin’ from Christmas Island will be going more than twice weekly under the Rudd government’s failed border protection policies. That will be an increase in their business. This brings a whole new meaning to the phrase ‘Kevin 747’. Of those two groups transferred to Villawood in late
March and early April, the Prime Minister said in his big statement:

Our view as a Government is that when it comes to asylum seekers, if they do not pass the test of being legitimate asylum seekers, then they are sent home. That is what has happened with the decision made about this group of 90 or 100 asylum seekers, and that is why they are currently being processed for return back home.

That was reported in the *Australian* on 29 March. They are still there. They are seeking appeals and those who have finished their appeals are now joining a High Court action. So it is back to the bad old days of asylum seekers lining up in our courts to extend their stays. The coalition policy of offshore processing in a third country ended those types of claims.

Under this Prime Minister, the government can refuse to assess a person’s asylum claim purely on the basis of their nationality. Those on the other side of the House might want to run and hide on this issue and pretend this is not a big deal. But they know that that decision on 9 April was absolutely and utterly discriminatory, and they should be ashamed of it. What they have said is: ‘If you’re an Afghan or you’re a Sri Lankan and you want to claim asylum in Australia then we’re not even going to assess your claim, not because of your circumstances; it is because you are an Afghan or a Sri Lankan.’

The members opposite know that the convention is very clear on the point that you cannot discriminate on the basis of someone’s nationality. They should be ashamed of that policy. Since they announced that policy, at least 30 boats, carrying over 1,000 asylum seekers, have come to Australia. The policy has proved to be as discriminatory as it is ineffective.

Is it any wonder that those running these boats to Australia are in no doubt about the resolve of this Prime Minister? He simply has no resolve. No-one knows where the Prime Minister stands on this issue. One day he is freezing asylum claims and the next day he is pretending to be Mother Teresa on these issues. You cannot work out where this guy stands on the issue of asylum seekers.

On this issue, he has walked both sides of the street—and taken a good stroll on the nature strips as well. Whether it is his abandonment of the policies that worked or his abandonment of his resolve when he rolled over on the *Oceanic Viking*, the people-smugglers have his measure. No wonder Sajjad Hussain Noor, a people-smuggler in Indonesia, told SBS:

… the door is open, if a door is open anyone can come in ... people think its easier in Australia ... you can become an Australian citizen straight away.

I do not doubt that the one-third of Australians who do not support the coalition’s strong border protection policies are motivated by a genuine sense of compassion. What I am disappointed about is that those opposite and others in this debate cannot acknowledge that pursuing policies that stop boats saves lives, stops putting people at risk and opens up opportunities for people in camps all around the world to have their chance of resettlement in this country. This government is denying them that chance because they simply cannot work out who they are and cannot pursue a coordinated or consistent policy on this matter. The coalition has the support of the Australian people on this issue because they know where we stand. By contrast, the Rudd government’s policies have failed and they know it. *(Time expired)*

**Mr McCLELLAND** (Barton—Attorney-General) *(4.41 pm)—*The shadow minister’s thesis was based on a desire to save lives, and I take him at face value—I know him and I know he is genuine in saying that—but I point out that the central theme of the opposition’s policy is the reintroduction of
temporary protection visas and the Pacific solution. In respect of the temporary protection visas, I ask members to reflect back to October 2001. On 18 October 2001, a vessel left a port in Indonesia carrying a bit over 400 people. The following day, that vessel sunk on the high seas in international waters. Upon that vessel there were women, children and some men. The women had one thing in common, aside from losing their lives. The women were coming to Australia to make contact, to resume their relationships, with male partners in Australia on temporary protection visas. The children were on that vessel because they were seeking to be reunited with their fathers in Australia on temporary protection visas.

On the night of 19 October 2001, 146 children lost their lives, 142 women lost their lives and 62 men lost their wives. The number of women and children on that vessel was significantly greater because of the then government’s temporary protection visa policy. There is absolutely no doubt about that, and I think that has been recognised by a number of members on the other side. Those events, more than anything, should cause the opposition to review their policies.

From analysing the issues, I can say that dealing with those seeking asylum internationally is a complex global challenge. From 2009 figures, in the order of 36 million people are of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in the order of 983,000 people are seeking asylum. It is a massive and complex international problem that is confronting the rest of the world. The United States takes by far the greatest number of asylum seekers—in the order of 50,000—and Canada takes 30,000. The European Union countries take 250,000 and eight of those countries received in excess of 10,000 asylum seekers in 2009—France, 40,000; the United Kingdom 30,000; Germany, 30,000. Australia received 6,000 people seeking asylum in 2009. That puts the issue in context. This issue requires perspective, balance and a proportionate response, not a response based on emotion, fear and rhetoric and, in particular, not a response that involves adopting policies that are draconian in their application and not based on the evidence.

The Australian government have some of the toughest border protection policies of any country in the world. We have excision of the offshore islands; we have offshore processing; we have mandatory detention for the purpose of conducting health, identity and security assessments; and, we have compulsory return of persons found to be not genuinely in need of asylum in our country. Indeed, in recent months there has been a rejection rate in the order of 50 per cent of those seeking asylum on the basis of information from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in-country information. As a result of that updated information and the need to obtain additional information, the government made a decision in April of this year to suspend processing claims for asylum for people from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Both the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Prime Minister indicated that, on resumption of processing and being in receipt of that updated information from the UNHCR and in-country information, it is likely that the rate of rejection will increase.

I note the text of the MPI criticises the government’s actions. This government has, more than any other peacetime government, devoted more to border protection in terms of interdiction capability, intelligence gathering capabilities and capacity building, working in cooperation with regional countries, introducing laws into Australia to introduce serious penalties for providing material support to a people-smuggling operation and giving the Australian Security Intelligence
Organisation the ability to assist law enforcement agencies in fighting people smuggling.

These are very significant steps that the government has taken and with quite some results. Domestically there have been 149 arrests, 45 convictions and 102 prosecutions. I note the shadow minister indicated the importance of working with and having good relations with our neighbours. As a result of significant international cooperation with our neighbours, Indonesia has undertaken 158 disruptions involving 3,810 people and has made 92 arrests; Malaysia has undertaken 28 disruptions involving 873 people and has made 12 arrests; Sri Lanka has had 16 disruptions with 275 people involved and 55 arrests. You have to ask yourself—and I do ask—what would be the consequence and the attitude of those countries if we effectively thumbed our noses at them in terms of working for a regional approach to this issue?

In that context I note the one issue the honourable member did not mention in his presentation was the policy of turning boats back. I again ask the question: what would have been the consequence of turning back SIEVX or suspect illegal vessel 10, which was the vessel on which the women and children perished on 19 October 2001? What would be the consequence of asking our servicemen and servicewomen to turn a boat such as that around? In reality the argument is a sham. Out of 242 boats involving 14,000 people, there were only ever seven boats turned around by the opposition. Again, I suggest it is all talk.

What the honourable member did not refer to in his speech is the evidence base that is required before draconian actions against people are introduced as a policy commitment. What are the facts? I note in his op-ed today the shadow minister referred to around 2001 when he put forward that, as a result of the then coalition’s policies, there was a dramatic decline in people seeking asylum in Australia. I think he acknowledged that between 1999 and 2001 there were some 12,000 people seeking asylum in Australia. That happened incidentally after the temporary protection visas were introduced in 1999. But what he does not advise the Australian people is that internationally there was a dramatic decline in the number of people seeking asylum between 2001 and 2003. In terms of Iraqis, there was a 50 per cent reduction from 50,400 to 25,300; Afghans, a 73 per cent drop from 52,900 to 14,216; and, Sri Lankans went from 14,500 to 5,600, a 61 per cent drop. In fact, 2001 and 2002 saw the largest scale returns in the 59-year history of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Those figures have not been disclosed by the opposition but they coincide with the reduction that the opposition is claiming to have occurred after 2001.

If I can bring that forward to the current situation to indicate that desperation is the motivator of people seeking asylum in Australia, between 2005 and 2008 the number of Afghans seeking asylum internationally went up 139 per cent from 7,700 to 18,400, the number of Sri Lankans went up 72 per cent from 5,600 to 9,600, and indeed the figures in respect of Afghans last year went up a further 34 per cent from 18,452 to 24,657. These numbers indicate the subsidence in those seeking asylum in 2001 and the re-emergence of those seeking asylum after those years to which I referred. They are the facts. Temporary protection visas did not work. They were introduced in 1999 and we saw the biggest influx under the former government during that period.

I question whether Australians want to go back to the Pacific solution. If you look at the facts—and they are considered by the
Australian people—I do not think they will. There were 1,637 people on Nauru and Manus Island. Seventy per cent of those people were resettled and 95 per cent of them were resettled in Australia. Ninety-five per cent were recognised as refugees. The so-called Pacific solution—that is, using these third countries—cost $314 million, whereas the amount spent by the government on surveillance during that period was only $264 million. So more was spent by the government in that offshore solution, in the words of Paul Kelly, ‘cajoling’ governments to accept these people.

In addition, if we think of the former government’s motives, their whole policy framework was based on treating people in the harsh and draconian manner that I have referred to for the purpose of creating a disincentive. That was the approach they previously adopted and I would remind the Australian people, and indeed members of the House, how children were treated under the period of the former government. In 1999-2000, there were 976 children in detention. In 2000-01, there were 1,923 children in detention. In 2001-02, there were 1,696 children detained behind razor wire. The concerning thing is not only the numbers but the length of time that children were detained. The average time was one year eight months and 11 days in 2003 and, as at 1 October 2003, more than 50 per cent of children had spent greater than two years in detention.

This is a serious issue. It is an issue of concern to the Australian people. The government is taking serious and very strident measures—indeed, some of the toughest policies in the world. But Australians do not want to see women and children drowning on the high seas trying to make contact with their partners who are here because family reunions have been precluded under temporary protection visas. They do not want to see 50 per cent of children being detained for in excess of two years on Nauru, Manus Island or some other third country. Australians are fair. They are decent people. They are prepared to make reasonable, proportionate decisions based on the facts. The opposition in their policy development have ignored those facts and I call on them to revise their views. (Time expired)

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (4.56 pm)—I want to respond to what the Attorney-General was just saying because I think this is very important. He said that the policy of temporary protection visas, which was successful in putting people smugglers out of business and which we intend to be successful again when we get back into government, has been responsible for people undertaking the dangerous journey to Australia illegally. I would say to him that the situation is exactly the opposite of that. It is the government’s weakness and lack of resolve on this issue that is encouraging people to undertake this dangerous journey. That is why we are now hearing anecdotal and media reports of boats that have left Indonesia and never been seen or heard from again. Presumably the people who were on those boats were lost, as he indicated at the start of his speech. We all know the Attorney-General is an honourable man; no-one on this side of the House would dispute that. But what he was saying is the exact opposite of what is actually occurring. What is occurring is that, because of the government’s lack of resolve and because of the government’s weakness, people smugglers have been encouraged to go back into that evil trade and subsequently people are again being lost while making the dangerous and hazardous journey to Australia.

In the 2½ years of the Rudd government there have been an astonishing number of failures—pink batts, the bloated school hall program, outrageous wasted spending and latterly this new mining tax that is going to drive a stake through the heart of Australia’s
prosperity—but their failure to protect Australia’s borders is perhaps the worst. When Labor came to office, they inherited a situation where this problem had been solved. All they needed to do was just leave well enough alone. If they had come to office and done what they said they were going to do prior to the last election—that is, continue with the tough border protection policies of the Howard government—Australia would not have had this problem re-emerge where we find a tsunami of illegal arrivals coming down to Australia, the greatest rate of illegal arrivals that we have seen in our history.

The empirical evidence on this just does not lie. It is so easy to understand what is happening here. The problem of illegal arrivals has occurred for a long period of time. In the 1990s it started to significantly deteriorate. By the mid-1990s we were experiencing up to 21 illegal boat arrivals a year. That started to increase towards the end of the 1990s. In the financial year 1989-90, we had 42 illegal boat arrivals carrying almost a thousand people. In the year 1999-2000, we had 54 illegal boat arrivals.

By the year 2000 the Howard government understood that if they were not going to do anything, if they were just going to sit back and allow this problem to snowball, it would get worse and worse because, of course, the more people who arrive here successfully, the more often that occurs, the more encouragement that gives to people to undertake this journey. The Howard government decided that we were not going accept this, so we instituted a series of measures that sent the message to the people smugglers that we were no longer going to be a soft touch for them to smuggle people into Australia illegally. Those measures are well documented, so I do not need to go through them all now, and they had an instantaneous effect of making sure that people smugglers could no longer go out and sell their product of gaining people entry illegally into Australia. Once we took those tough measures, this problem essentially evaporated. In the six years from the end of 2002 we had 18 illegal boat arrivals. So, on average, we had three illegal boat arrivals a year. That is just a weekend of illegal arrivals under this government.

As I said, this problem had essentially evaporated because the people smugglers could not go out and sell a product when the message had gone out loud and clear to the international community that Australia was no longer a soft touch on our borders. Then Kevin Rudd came to office. Just prior to the last election he said that he would happily turn the boats around. Like so many of the promises that he made, this one proved to be hollow. In August 2008 he decided that to make himself a hero to the left wing of his own party he was going to weaken the robust system of border protection that was put in place by the previous government. He did that by abolishing temporary protection visas and replacing them with permanent protection, by closing the offshore processing that had been successful in Nauru and Manus Island, by reneging on the promise to turn boats back when the circumstances allowed and, most shamefully, by making a special deal to process 78 passengers on board the Oceanic Viking—certainly one of the low points in Australia’s immigration history.

When Kevin Rudd came to office he inherited a situation where there were eight people in detention on Christmas Island—there are now about 2½ thousand, and every week there are charter flights taking people from Christmas Island to the mainland—but he could not just leave it alone. As a result of the weakening of Australia’s border protection system, the people smugglers were encouraged back into business. Again you can look at it empirically, it is just so clear: within months of Kevin Rudd making the
announcement that he was going soft on our borders, the people smugglers went back into business. In 2008-09 we had 24 illegal arrivals. In this last financial year we have now had 112 illegal boat arrivals in Australian waters. It is the worst year on record, and those boats have brought over 4½ thousand people illegally to Australia.

Just so everyone understands, I will explain the way this evil trade works, because I think that is very important. I have had the opportunity to go out with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and with the Navy and also to visit Christmas Island within recent months. What is happening is that people smugglers are incredibly sophisticated organised criminal networks and there is a lot of money involved. People can pay up to US$15,000 a head to be smuggled illegally into Australia. If you think about that, an illegal boat arrival of 60 people could mean up to three-quarters of a million Australian dollars for the criminal networks that have facilitated it. So this is big business and significant organised crime, yet these are the people who are now in control of part of Australia’s humanitarian immigration program.

What happens is that you get to Indonesia or Malaysia and you contact a people smuggler. Those networks are very well established. You make arrangements for them to smuggle you into Australia. You embark usually at one of two points within Indonesia—one in Java and one in West Timor. If you are leaving from West Timor you head directly south to the Ashmore islands; if you are leaving from Java you head directly south to Christmas Island. Contrary to popular opinion you are not trying to avoid the Australian authorities. The whole trade is actually about running into the Australian authorities. The most sophisticated networks will equip these boats with positioning systems and satellite phones so you can identify that you are in Australian waters. You will then contact the Australian government—sometimes the Western Australian police, sometimes the Australian Maritime Safety Authority—and there have been reports of contacting people overseas who have then contacted Australian authorities. The Australian authorities will come and collect you and transfer you to Christmas Island. When you are on Christmas Island you will be processed within, on average, 104 days and then your chance of coming to Australia permanently is in the high 90s.

What a great product for people smugglers to sell! You pay them up to US$15,000, they will get you into Australian waters, the Australian authorities will come and collect you and transfer you to Christmas Island and, within a couple of months of being on Christmas Island, your chances of coming to Australia permanently are incredibly high. Whilst that continues to be the situation, people smugglers will be able to sell that product, as they are doing, in increasing numbers. That is why this problem continues to snowball, why the rate of illegal arrivals continues to increase over time. The consequences are that Labor has broken its promise not to process people on the mainland Australia and that the Australian taxpayer has had to shell out another $1 billion because of the budget blow-out. That is an astonishing figure. It comprises $770 million to increase the offshore asylum seeker management program and $236 million to be spent on capital items, including the upgrade of the facility on Christmas Island, the reopening of the Curtin detention facility and the upgrades to other centres around Australia. And just today we have heard more information about the expensive charter flights which have now blown out to cost the Australian taxpayer $8.2 million.

All this because Kevin Rudd just could not leave the policy alone when he came to
government. Only the coalition have the resolve to actually do something to address this issue. The Prime Minister has effectively said that Labor will not do anything more. They just accept that this is now the situation, that people smugglers will control part of Australia’s immigration system. The coalition have a plan to put those people smugglers out of business. We will commence discussions to find a place to process people offshore, a policy that has been successful in the past. We will reintroduce temporary protection visas, a vital part of the program to discourage people smugglers from their trade. We will also turn the boats back when circumstances allow. (Time expired)

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (5.06 pm)—The Liberal Party is long on fear but very short on solutions and very, very short on facts. The two speeches that we have just heard on this matter of public importance, from the member for Cook and member for Stirling, are yet a further representation of just how long on fear and short on facts the opposition actually is: ‘Never let the facts get in the way of a good scare campaign.’ There is nothing but fear from the Liberal Party—fear and a refusal to consider the context in which people come from all over the world to Australia as unauthorised boat arrivals.

This is a fear campaign which, first, is based on ignoring the very small numbers of unauthorised arrivals by boat in Australia and, indeed, the very small numbers of refugee claims. We have had it again from the member for Stirling, who referred ludicrously to the ‘tsunami’ of arrivals. That kind of language is completely unhelpful in considering the real issues that are involved. It is a very small number of unauthorised arrivals and a small number of refugees and refugee claims. The number of displaced persons is small by comparison to the total number of unauthorised arrivals in other countries. The number of asylum claims is small in relation to asylum claims in other countries.

Let us take the experience in Europe, for example. Compared to the very small numbers in Australia, in Europe there were 286,700 asylum claims in 2009, 283,700 in 2008 and 249,600 in 2007. The United States, with the largest number of claims of any of the industrialised countries, had nearly 50,000 claims in 2009, closely followed by France with 42,000 and Canada with 33,000 claims for asylum. A relatively small number—6,500 claims in total—were lodged in Australia and New Zealand combined in 2009. That is to give proper context, to look at the smallness of the actual numbers involved, which is where this debate should be positioned. The numbers are small in relation to the total immigration to Australia, small in comparison to the number of unauthorised arrivals or visa overstayers who come by air, and small compared to Australia’s population of around 22.3 million and growing.

This is a disgraceful fear campaign which demonises people in need and diminishes the humanity of every Australian. It is a fear campaign which ignores the long history of resettlement of refugees in this country, a history of which all Australians can be very proud. Since the Second World War over 700,000 refugees and displaced persons have settled in Australia. Australia played a large part in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and article 14 of that universal declaration declares the rights of everyone anywhere in the world to seek asylum. The 1951 refugee convention, which Australia is a party to and played a large part in the creation of, prohibits states from imposing penalties on those who arrive without authorisation coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom is threat-
People seeking asylum are not illegal, and the member for Cook and the member for Stirling should stop misleading this House by suggesting that they are. It is very important that it is understood clearly just what the status is of unauthorised arrivals by boat.

Part of the fear campaign is carried out by misrepresentation of the firm approach that the Rudd government has taken to unauthorised arrivals. We have more assets patrolling our borders than any Australian government in the past. We have spent more on international cooperation to counter people smuggling than any other government. One hundred and thirty-nine arrests and 45 convictions of people smugglers have taken place in Australia since September 2008. There are currently 92 people being prosecuted in Australian courts for people smuggling. The government recently introduced further measures into the parliament to strengthen Australia’s anti-people-smuggling laws, and of course we work cooperatively with our regional partners to combat people smuggling. We take a responsible approach to genuine asylum seekers and protecting our national security, including offshore processing, mandatory detention and stringent health, identity and ASIO security checks. We act consistently with our international obligations, which is a very different position from that presently being adopted by those opposite, who are simply playing politics.

Their fear campaign rests on the false assertion that global factors are irrelevant. In that regard, it is worth remembering what the former immigration minister of the former government, the member for Berowra, said in 1999 at the time of large increases in unauthorised arrivals. He said:

It is timely to remember that the use of people smugglers to get around a country’s rules about who can come and who can stay is a world-wide problem. Australia is not alone. We are also seeing large numbers of people seeking asylum in developed countries—people from the same groups as we are seeing in Australia. For example, Iraqi asylum-seekers are registered in 77 countries and last year there were over 34,000 applications for asylum lodged by Iraqis in 19 European countries.

Exactly the same position as obtained in 1999 is still the case today. Australia is not alone in seeing increases in claims from people from Afghanistan. In 2008 and 2009 there were increases in unauthorised arrivals from Afghanistan experienced in several other countries around the world, including the US, Canada, Germany, France and Norway. We saw in this country in 2008 and 2009—reflecting dreadful circumstances in Sri Lanka—an increase in asylum claims from Sri Lanka, and there has been a corresponding increase in asylum claims from people from Sri Lanka in France, in Switzerland, in New Zealand, in Japan and in Germany. We have even seen asylum seekers from Sri Lanka arriving on the west coast of Canada. This is a phenomenon that is worldwide. It was properly recognised by the former immigration minister, the member for Berowra, and those opposite should recognise it now rather than conducting the kind of fear campaign that they are conducting. They would rather continue with their pretence that the barbarous and inhumane methods which they wish to return to—including the appalling suggestion that there should be a turning back of boats—are effective. These sorts of methods diminish us all, and it is a pretence to suggest that they are effective.

Part of the fear campaign—and that is the supposed topic of the matter of public importance today—is the use of language like ‘budget blow-out’ which, again, is seeking to entirely ignore the context in which this problem arises. It pretends that the Howard government did not equally spend vast amounts of money on its regrettably partially
failed solution, and those vast amounts of money included some $1.5 billion spent on processing unauthorised maritime arrivals, coping with just the three-year surge that was experienced from 1999 to 2001. During the time of the Howard government there were some 244 boats carrying 13,659 asylum seekers and, unsurprisingly, there was an increase in Commonwealth expenditure to deal with that surge in unauthorised arrivals. During that surge in 1999, 2000 and 2001 when over 12,000 people arrived, the Liberals under former Prime Minister John Howard did exactly what the government is now doing—they increased our country’s detention capacity and increased the resources that were directed to it. It was of course the Howard government that built the Christmas Island detention centre, at a cost of almost $400 million. It was announced originally in the 2002 budget at a cost of $153.7 million for construction costs and $34.4 million in commissioning, but it blew out to almost $400 million.

It is about time that those opposite tried to return debate on this subject to something approaching a humane basis, to something approaching a rational basis, and not persist with their fear campaign. (Time expired)

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (5.16 pm)—I rise this afternoon to speak on this very important matter of public importance to do with this government’s failed immigration and border protection policies. I do so in the context of what happened in my own electorate last Friday. Last Friday I learned from a leak from the media that the department of immigration was looking at placing illegal arrivals in an unused mining camp—although there are still 30 people in it—at Dalby. This is because of the overflow from Christmas Island. There was no consultation with me or the community. There had been some very scant contact with the mayor, who I understand this afternoon is meeting with the department of immigration here in Canberra. I think he has been told that at this stage they do not have plans prepared to put people into Dalby. I emphasise ‘at this stage’. I suggest the minister will have the final say.

While the Dalby community was reacting to this news late last week, two more illegal boats arrived in our waters, which takes the total to 136 boats. The Rudd government’s policy on border protection has been a clear failure. Since this government changed the legislation in 2008 and softened Australia’s border protection, some 6,389 people have risked their lives to travel here in 136 dodgy boats. This year alone, 2010, some 3,354 people have arrived in some 68 leaky boats. Late last year, tragically, a boat disappeared with at least 100 people reportedly having died. And this is just one of the incidents that gets reported—what happens to the others who have taken this treacherous trip but have not made it? They have been utilising people-smuggling rackets in an effort to come to our shores because of the soft approach that this government has taken to protecting Australia’s borders. Quite clearly, when the Rudd government softened its policies it sent a message to the people smugglers of the world, and they are making money out of human misery. That is the problem with this policy.

Under the Howard government, the illegal, insidious trade of people smuggling was brought to a grinding halt. In November 2007, there were just two detainees on Christmas Island. The population now is at least 2,500. Look at the Howard government’s record. According to the World Refugee Survey conducted by the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, the Rudd government resettled 25 per cent fewer refugees in 2009, some 8,742, than under the Howard government in 2007, which settled 12,133. So we clearly had a policy of show-
ing compassion and playing our part, taking a humanitarian approach, in dealing with people who are in refugee camps around the world. I have been to some of these refugee camps, and your heart goes out to those people who are trying to find a country they can go to to get a better chance in life. I have seen them firsthand.

People on the weekend were making comments that Dalby is a racist and xenophobic community. I reject that absolutely. Many 457 visa workers have come to my electorate. I want to read into the record in the limited time available some information from Diesel Electrics, a small business in Dalby. They have two 457 employees, and until two weeks ago one man had not seen his wife and seven-year-old son for nearly two years. They have come to this country legally. They are educated and hardworking, and have also come from very desperate circumstances. They get no support and have to pay over $400 a month in private health insurance just to be here and to have access to medical facilities such as the Dalby hospital. The 457 visa approach has been working, and the current situation just does not seem fair to this person or to many other people in my community of Dalby. (Time expired)

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (5.22 pm)—I rise to speak on this matter of public importance. Let’s call a spade a spade. The low-grade politics pursued by the opposition dates back to their loss in the 1993 election. After that loss, bipartisanship on immigration was destroyed in their pursuit to win the 1996 election. There was no time limit on the detention of women and children. There was no time limit on the processing of applications. We, as part of our policy prior to the last election, said we would get rid of TPVs. We also put time lines on the processing of applications.

At the moment, we have suspended for three months and six months two classes of visa. That does not breach the Racial Discrimination Act or the convention. It is merely to have a look at the current situation in those countries to see whether the situation has changed and whether people still have a well-founded fear of persecution. Reasonable lawyers will tell you that. We have a humane policy. We are not pariahs in the international community.

The Howard government, in response to Tampa, ambushed the then opposition with less than an hour’s notice on legislation—not because it was humane, not because it was good policy but because they were languishing in the polls and it was a political solution. It was a successful political solution. But where are the Tampa asylum seekers
now? Most of them were successfully processed as refugees and relocated. In our current policy, we have wound back the harsher elements of the Howard regime and we do not apologise. We conform to our international obligations and have put more resources towards that.

The worst part of all this is the signal that is going out to the community. The two areas where there should be bipartisan support and where both sides should sit down and talk to one another are Aboriginal issues and immigration. This country was founded on migration. We have taken in refugees and we should be proud of it. These people are now being demonised. They are called illegal when they are not. The term is ‘asylum seekers’. If they are not genuine refugees, they are sent back home.

An alternative government continuing to do this is a disgrace. It is done for one reason only—not because they are more humane or compassionate or because their policy will work; it is a sleazy grab for votes from those sections of the community that respond to this button when it is pushed. We should be trying to educate the community.

When I look at the figures going back 20 years or so there is not much variation. I was a member of the Keating government when we introduced mandatory detention. I stood up and said it was the right policy at the time because you should not release people into the community unless they have had health and security checks and unless they have passed the threshold test of whether they are genuine asylum seekers, genuine refugees.

This debate by the opposition is a disgrace. They have taken the low road and it is all about votes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz)—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

FOREIGN EVIDENCE AMENDMENT BILL 2010
TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2010 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2010
Assent
Messages from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement
Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Parliamentary Secretary for Employment) (5.27 pm)—I move:
That order of the day No. 1, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.
Question agreed to.

ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (CLOSE OF ROLLS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL (No. 2) 2010
Cognate bills:
ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (PRE-POLL VOTING AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010
ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (MODERNISATION AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010
ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (HOW-TO-VOTE CARDS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2010

Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 June, on motion by Mr Gray:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (5.28 pm)—The four electoral amendment bills before the House today, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Vot-
ing and Other Measures) Bill 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010, represent a mix. They are mostly good measures but they do include some very bad measures. The coalition welcomes the decision of the government to not proceed with its original Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill 2010. It was disappointing to see that the government had broken with tradition and had included both controversial and non-controversial amendments in the same bill. Under the previous government there were always two bills which came out of the JSCEM report into the previous election—a non-controversial one for machinery provisions and a controversial one for policy changes. I am happy to see that the government now, albeit tacitly, admits its original error and we will now be dealing with these matters as has been done in the past.

I will go first to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010. This bill represents schedules 1 and 2 of the original close of rolls bill. The coalition will be opposing this new bill. I do not wish to dwell too long on this bill, as the reasons for our opposition to these measures have been laid out previously, both by speakers in this House at the time of the consideration of the original bill as well as in the coalition members’ dissenting report on the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

On the close of rolls, the fundamental point is this: the closure of the rolls seven days after the issue of a writ is a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral roll. The previous coalition government, in line with longstanding policy, moved to protect the integrity of the roll and prevent fraudulent enrolments by reducing the time period between the calling of an election and the close of the rolls. Closing the roll at 8 pm on the day the writs for the election are issued—which is usually three or four days after the election is called—for people enrolling for the first time and people re-enrolling after being removed from the roll currently gives the Electoral Commission an extra seven days to verify new enrolments and an extra four days to verify changes of address. At a time when the Electoral Commission is processing a large number of enrolments, hundreds of thousands in some cases, these changes have greatly assisted the commission in identifying and discounting fraudulent enrolments.

Under the old scheme, to which Labor want to return, more than 520,000 changes to enrolment or new enrolments were submitted to the Australian Electoral Commission in the seven-day period before the close of rolls during the 2004 federal election. Bear in mind that it was after the 2004 election but before the 2007 election that the previous government made this fundamental change—that the roll close on the day the writs for the election are issued—because of these 520,000 changes to enrolment or new enrolments being submitted to the Electoral Commission, giving them very little time to deal with them. The proposed time frame of seven days will again make it virtually impossible to exclude fraudulent votes from the count. The commission simply does not have the resources, whether people or time, to go through such large numbers.

Furthermore, official AEC figures show that under the coalition’s rules the number of people missing the close of rolls deadline in 2007 was 100,370, compared to 168,394 in 2004. In short, our scheme, the scheme of the previous government, was 40 per cent more effective than the scheme Labor is now try-
ing to reimpose on the roll. The combination of a very effective campaign run by the Australian Electoral Commission before the 2007 election to encourage enrolment, combined with the fact that failure to enrol prior to the election being called would result in not being able to vote, had a very positive effect on encouraging enrolment.

Despite that difference in outcomes between 2004, under the system that the Labor Party is now seeking to reimpose, and 2007, we are now going back to a system which will be unable to be properly monitored and processed by the Electoral Commission, open up opportunities for fraudulent activity and work against the interests of democracy and the interests that all of us in this House should be aiming for. The 2007 outcome highlighted the virtue of an enforcement incentive over the liberalised approach that we are seeing in this bill.

The coalition consider that the existing arrangements ensure that the electoral roll contains a high degree of accuracy and integrity, and we are concerned that the extra time period allows for a return to a system which permits calculated, fraudulent enrolments to take place. The coalition also believe that a return to the previous system of seven days will serve to discourage citizens from making or maintaining their enrolment in the ordinary course of the year, as they will have the opportunity to delay such action until an election is called. The numbers support this: as I said, in 2007, 100,000 people had to be processed; in 2004, under the system that the Labor Party is seeking to re-impose, it was 168,000—a level which the commission would be unable to process, given the sheer weight of numbers and the resources that the commission has at its disposal.

On the question of production of proof of identity for provisional voters, the previous government, in line with longstanding policy, moved to prevent fraudulent voting by people impersonating other voters, by requiring that people who claim a provisional vote at an election produce evidence of their true identity and their enrolled address, either on polling day or in the week following polling day. It is simply a common-sense and sensible measure and not an unduly difficult requirement to place on people. The coalition is opposed to any weakening of the proof of identity provisions in relation to provisional voting on the grounds that it removes an important deterrent to citizens seeking to engage in multiple voting. According to the Electoral Commission, approximately 75 per cent of provisional voters showed evidence of identity when voting. Of the 33,900 provisional voters who failed to provide such identification on polling day, only one in five subsequently provided proof of identity by the cut-off date—that is, the close of business on the following Friday.

The government has argued, without any supporting evidence, that the attrition rate is a result of voter apathy as a result of the election result being known. This conclusion is difficult to reconcile with the fact that in the electorates of Swan and McEwen, for example, there were 260 and 188 provisional voters respectively who failed to provide their proof of identity in the week following the poll and each seat, as we all know, hung in the balance throughout the following week and well beyond. So here we have across two seats that went to the wire nearly 400 voters who the Labor Party asserts were just apathetic or knew the result of the election so did not turn up and provide proof of their identity.

The argument is made that the validity of these voters can be determined by comparing signatures; however, such a process would fail to provide any deterrent or consequence for voters who fail to meet their obligations to maintain their enrolment under the act.
Such failures should trigger a requirement for a more stringent process. Any proposal to weaken the rules in relation to proof of identity for provisional votes should be opposed because it makes voting fraud easier.

The provisions that are in place now and are being removed are not punitive or unduly difficult for people to comply with. It is a reasonable request. It is common sense. You have to ask why the Labor Party are doing what they are doing on these two essentially common-sense provisions. It will certainly make it more difficult for the Electoral Commission. We had a better result under the previous government’s provisions in the 2007 election. It makes no sense that the government would move to make these changes other than to provide opportunities for people to run fast and loose with our electoral system. For these reasons, the coalition cannot support these two measures and will be opposing the close of rolls bill.

The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010 will be supported by the coalition. At the current time pre-poll votes are treated as declaration votes and must go through an administrative checking procedure in the week following polling day. This creates a significant and unnecessary administrative burden on the Electoral Commission. The government’s proposal seeks to treat these votes as ordinary votes, although electors who wish to cast them will still be required to fill out and sign a declaration asserting their need to cast such a vote. The benefit will be that these pre-poll votes will now be able to be counted on the night, leading to an earlier and more accurate result.

This is a sensible and significant provision, given that I have observed over the last few elections a very significant increase in pre-poll votes. I know in my seat that the combined pre-poll and postal votes went from around 14 per cent in 2004 to 20 per cent in 2007. I think that is probably true across many electorates too. If these votes are treated as ordinary votes—and they can be; there is no threat to the integrity of the system—we will get a far clearer idea in many seats on election night because they can be counted on election night.

There is an administrative amendment that allows the Electoral Commission to transfer workload relating to the processing of enrolments between different divisional returning offices. There are strong efficiency arguments to be made in allowing divisional returning offices to farm out work to other offices, particularly when there are high levels of demand or if sickness or leave requirements make a divisional returning office short-staffed for a period and unable to manage their expected workload. We support this measure.

The coalition supports the change to electronic updating of voter records. Increasingly, transactions are being done online for the sake of convenience and speed. By allowing individuals already on the roll to maintain their own records, you effectively cut out the double or triple handling of enrolment forms. The coalition note there is no provision for new enrolments to be lodged electronically. We support this restriction and reconfirm our strong view that all first-time enrolments should be done in hard copy.

On the question of single party nomination per seat: the coalition can see no reason for a party to run multiple candidates in a single seat other than as a campaigning tactic to try to push up the informal vote. As such, we support this measure.

Prior to the 2007 election the coalition moved to give blind and vision impaired people the opportunity for the first time in their lives to cast a secret ballot. Labor discontinued this on the basis that it was too
This returned blind and vision impaired people back to the unhappy situation of having to cast a non-secret vote. The coalition supports this measure on the understanding that this is only an interim arrangement ahead of further consultations which will be held with various community organisations. As such, I can advise the House that the coalition will be supporting this bill without amendment.

The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010 will be supported by the coalition, but we are concerned that the response does not match the crime. We are reviewing provisions in that regard. It is notable that this bill arises because of a deliberate scam by the ALP in the 2010 South Australian state election. The South Australian ALP handed out how-to-vote cards that appeared to be official Family First how-to-vote cards, but the preferencing order favoured the ALP candidates. Labor operatives were brought in, some even from interstate, to wear T-shirts that appeared to indicate that they were Family First booth workers and to hand out the bogus how-to-vote cards.

This is not a one-off, sadly. It is a deliberate scam that the ALP have used before, both in New South Wales and Queensland, which was legitimised by the infamous cases of Webster v Deahm in 1993 and in Carroll v Electoral Commission of Queensland in 1998. It is nice to see that after only some 17 years Labor have now admitted that the decisions in those cases were morally wrong and that they are now seeking to correct the judicial errors. Of course it has taken the shame and the disgust of the community over the actions in the Adelaide election for Labor to move on this matter.

This bill would require all how-to-vote cards to place, in a prominent size, the name and party of the authoriser or face a fine of $1,100. A false authorisation would incur a similar fine. Given the hullabaloo which the Labor members on the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters made about the unauthorised pamphlets, it seems a rather light penalty, and an insipid penalty if you like, for such a serious offence against the Electoral Act. There is no doubt that many operatives in the Labor Party would be willing to forgo $1,000 to ensure the victory of the local ALP candidate through false preferencing arrangements. After that election in South Australia the veteran Flinders University political scientist, Professor Dean Jaensch, said it was:

… the worst example of its kind I’ve seen in a 40-year career …

He went on to say:

It is deceitful, deliberately designed to mislead voters … No doubt at all.

On the primaries and two-party preferred, more people voted Liberal than Labor in that election, but Labor won more than the 50 per cent of seats they needed to form government through the vagaries of electoral boundaries and by using trickery and fraud. Three key marginals were so tight in that election that Labor needed them all. The material was deceptive and misleading and plainly showed nothing but contempt for the political process.

It is not drawing a long bow to suggest that the current government in South Australia is illegitimate because of the way in which this fraudulent activity influenced votes across three or four marginal seats. The government has been elected on a fraud. This was the case of an election that was rorted. It is the shameless thieving of an election result. You would think — on the basis of such a consequence of the democratic process being so compromised and being put under attack in this way — that the government, who have run 100 miles from this action but have con-
doned it not only in South Australia but in other elections in other places, would see the need for a penalty which met the crime. As I said earlier we will be looking to see what we can do to address that matter and we would hope to get the cooperation of those opposite. The penalty of 50 or more units might be far more appropriate especially in the instance of deliberate false authorisation details.

The coalition strongly supports the principle of the how-to-vote bill. We have not engaged in such activities but we have overwhelmingly been the victims of such underhand tactics by the ALP. We support the government’s belated attempt to place a legislative prohibition on its own party’s rorting. I will seek at a later stage to introduce some amendments which look at the severity of the penalty that will be imposed for any return of such action by any party.

Finally the fourth bill, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010, purports to be a series of uncontroversial minor amendments arising out of the unanimous recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into the 2007 federal election. In the main this bill is acceptable but there are some significant problems which need to be addressed.

The first measure moves the Australian Electoral Commission towards a more digital system of records management. We will be supporting this measure. The second measure changes the evidence of identity rules for enrolments. It removes the mandatory need for a witness to attest to the identity of a person and reduces the acceptable identity documentation to a smaller field of items. We will be supporting this measure. The third measure allows for provisional enrolment at age 16 as opposed to the current age of 17. We support this move by the Australian Electoral Commission to get a more accurate electoral roll and, as a consequence, we will support this measure. The fourth measure moves the Australian Electoral Commission towards a more digital system of electoral roll management, distribution and use on polling day. It also allows for a more flexible production of ballot papers with appropriate security devices on polling day. We will be supporting this measure. The fifth measure, standardised mobile polling booth practices, is a sensible and welcome measure and we will be supporting it.

The sixth measure has both controversial and non-controversial aspects to it. The non-controversial aspects include the removal of the need for a witness in a request for a postal vote and allow the signature date as opposed to the postmark date on the postal vote to be accepted. The first point makes it easier for single people to request a postal vote. The second point goes a long way to addressing the very legitimate concerns that postal voters in rural and regional Australia have had given that they do not have everyday postal services. Of course we will be supporting these sensible measures.

However, Labor has added two controversial aspects. The aspects were not considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, and we are disappointed that Labor has attempted to sneak these provisions through in an otherwise non-controversial bill. One proposal is that postal vote applications could only be returned directly to the AEC and the other is that there would be a prohibition on the attachment of extra material to a postal vote application form. The coalition can see no valid reason for the introduction of these measures by the government and strongly suspects that this has been done in a cynical attempt to undermine the extremely successful postal voting processes of the coalition parties. Even a simple reading of the voter returns shows
that the coalition consistently polls higher with postal votes than with any other type of declaration vote.

The Labor government is seeking to make substantial changes to a system of voting where the coalition does well, despite there being absolutely no evidence to support any need for such a change. There has been no argument which supports the move by the Labor Party. This is a totally cynical move and the motives of the Labor Party on these aspects of the bills need to be very seriously questioned. We will be strongly opposing those parts of the PVA measures which appear to have no merit other than that of being an attack on the coalition. This bill is not intended to be a bill used for the purposes of improving the electoral prospects of either side of the House. This bill is intended to improve the democratic process, yet it is very clear that without any arguments, good or bad, being advanced in support of it, the Labor government has sought to sneak this measure in without putting it before the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. It is a pathetic attempt to overcome an advantage.

This process works well. People regard highly the opportunity to have their postal vote application assisted by this process. Both parties inform their electorates about positions of the party and the process that people need to go through. It has been a very satisfactory measure. There has been no community discontent with this measure. There have been no arguments advanced. It is a purely cynical measure by the ALP to remove a practice which we exercise more effectively than the Labor Party.

The seventh measure modernises the provisions for homeless voters. In principle, the measures were supported by the coalition members of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. However, the coalition has identified concerns about item 9. Item 9 seeks to repeal section 96(9)(a) of the act. This section states:

(9) A person ceases to be entitled to be treated as an itinerant elector under this section if:

(a) while the person is being so treated, a general election is held at which the person neither votes nor applies for a postal vote …

The implication that flows from such an amendment is that there is no practical provision to ever remove an itinerant elector from the roll. It is axiomatic that you cannot do a habitation review on a homeless person. Unless the itinerant elector is unusually diligent in keeping their enrolment details up to date, the only way to determine if they have left the electorate or died is if they do not show up on polling day.

This proposed amendment from Labor is an open invitation to abuse the integrity of the electoral roll. Once a person gets on the roll as an itinerant elector in a particular division, they will never leave the roll for that particular division, irrespective of their true place of residence. The opportunity for organising a campaign of fraudulent voting is obvious and the Australian Electoral Commission could never check the bona fides of any potential roll rorter. Thus the proposed repeal of 96(9)(a) is bad policy because it fundamentally weakens the integrity of the electoral roll. Again, under several provisions in this series of bills, we see the integrity of the electoral roll being fundamentally weakened. It is unacceptable and the government has provided no alternative mechanism for roll-cleansing of itinerant voters. I foreshadow moving amendments to schedules 6 and 7 in the detailed debate.

The eighth measure broadens and standardises the reasons for claiming a prepoll vote. In many ways this legitimises what has been existing practice in many DROs. It is
well-known both to officers and prepoll booth workers that many people come in to prepoll because they will be out of the electorate or otherwise engaged on polling day. This measure is a sensible change to make voting easier for those who simply prefer to lodge an early ballot and we will be supporting this measure. The ninth measure is simply a series of minor technical amendments. These do not change policy in any way and, despite not having gone through the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, will have the support of the coalition.

In summary, we welcome the majority of the measures in this bill, but we will be seeking to make a number of important amendments to address changes which would eat at the heart of the integrity of our electoral process. We are concerned that a series of important bills, which should have the mutual support of both sides of the House, now present three changes which will fundamentally attack the integrity of the electoral process and one change which is simply a change out of spite—a change to remove a process which the coalition is currently more effective at using. It is quite unfortunate, but we will be seeking to make changes to some of these bills. The remaining measures will be supported, as I have indicated throughout my address.

Mr SULLIVAN (Longman) (5.58 pm)—I am very pleased to speak on this suite of four bills, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010, Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010, amending the electoral and referendum processes in this country. I say at the outset that I have some experience in elections. I believe I have now participated in 27 in total, seven as a campaign director and five as a candidate, with my sixth as a candidate coming up. I strongly support the electoral system that we have in Australia and I have been pleased to be able to do that as a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

We probably have the best electoral system in the world, and no lesser authority than a former US Secretary of State said so recently. We have a representative democracy. We have adult suffrage. We have equal suffrage. We also have compulsory voting, which is often a point of contention with some but I would contend that compulsory voting compels the government to give every citizen an opportunity to vote. Some of the amendments in this suite of bills actually go toward giving people the opportunity to vote, whereas obstacles have been put in the way of people doing that in the past. We also have—I am not sure that it is unique anymore—a wonderful system for the distribution of preferences. Elsewhere in the world this system is called the ‘Australian ballot’, because we invented it here. We can, if we will, also call it preferential voting, but the rest of the world calls it the Australian ballot—except in the United Kingdom, which is about to have a referendum on adopting the Australian system. They are calling it the ‘single transferable vote’ because, heaven forbid, that Westminster, which gave the world democracy, should import something from one of the colonies. I wish them well with that, and maybe they can pick up a few more of our advancements such as voting on the weekend so that workers do not have to get their boss’s permission to go out to vote. Ours is, without question, one of the best participatory democracies of a representative nature in the world.

There are a number of things that I would like to see happen in the future, some of which are non-controversial and others con-
troversial, as the member for Goldstein would say. I am more than anxious to see a great deal more of our transactions, as voters, with the Australian Electoral Commission conducted online. It is quite clear now that most of us in this place, I am sure, would be using online banking. It is very difficult sometimes to get to a bank with our schedules, but we can do that with great safety and great security these days by banking online. I am sure a bank-like system could be adopted by the Australian Electoral Commission to enable voters to interact with the commission online.

I also dream of a day in the future when Indigenous Australians are able to participate in our electoral system in a manner similar to that enjoyed by Maori people in New Zealand. They are provided a separate Maori roll and people identifying as Maori are able to be on that roll or the general roll. There is a quota for Maori members elected to the New Zealand parliament. I think there are five Maori seats covering the whole country. This, of course, gives the indigenous people of New Zealand the enormous benefit of having seats at the table where the main decisions are made.

The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010 attracted the most opposition from the member for Goldstein in his presentation when he spoke before me on the suite of bills. In Australia today, we have an enormously mobile population. In my area, the population is mobile within the electorate as well as across electorates. In the Australian context, we do not have a 19-day campaign with a fixed election date, such as they have in New South Wales where the rolls are closed on the day that the writs are issued. We have an expectation, certainly amongst the community, that an election will be held this year but there is no certainty of that occurring because the election does not have to be held until 16 April 2011.

Mr Slipper—Are you telling us something?

Mr SULLIVAN—I am not telling you anything, member for Fisher. The idea that the rolls should close when the writs are issued has an interesting side to it. The member for Goldstein said that this is a bad measure. If it is such a measure why did the former Prime Minister, Mr Howard, wait five or six days after telling everyone when the election was going to be before issuing the writs? He did not announce the election and issue the writs immediately. He waited for a period of time. Any future government or future Prime Minister would also have the same facility available to them. Whether or not seven days is written into law, a simple administrative act by the government of the day can ensure that what is regarded as fair is put into place. So I question the suggestion by the member for Goldstein that the opposition’s proposals were 40 per cent more effective. I do not think he can draw that from the evidence that was given to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. It is not my recollection of the evidence given by the AEC that they believed that this measure provided an opportunity for identity fraud. In the past, people have had a week to correct their enrolment details. I doubt that that has acted as a discouragement in any way to people wanting to update their enrolments. In fact, it is more likely that in order to change the simplest detail, people have had to fill out the entire enrolment form again. This issue is being addressed in the bills before us.

The member for Goldstein was also very critical of the idea of people turning up to cast a provisional vote without having to provide proof of identity. We say that the AEC ought to be able to revert to the old
system of checking the signature of a person casting a provisional vote against their previously held signatures. Whether or not we are fans of the genre, the forensic police programs that we view on television show us just how quickly material of that nature can be checked and sorted. The main point I want to make about this is that of course nobody attends a polling booth to make a provisional vote; they attend a polling booth to make an ordinary vote. They cannot make an ordinary vote when, for one reason or another, their enrolment details are not held and, hence, they need to make a provisional vote. I support—and I am not necessarily alone in this, but I have not had a great deal of support—each and every Australian voter being given a voter card, an electronic swipe card. Let us move towards using the technology. Every person’s right to vote would be directed by that card. However, that seems to be a little beyond what the people of Australia are looking for at the moment.

The evidence of identity for provisional voting and close of roll provisions in this legislation are going to be opposed by the coalition. The coalition will thereby be keeping in place barriers against people voting. One of the hallmarks of our voting system should be that people are able to vote with great ease. I note with a degree of pleasure that the majority of the measures in the modernisation bill are to be supported by the coalition. I think it is important, at a time when there are so many debates about the voting age, that we not lose sight of the issue at hand. People being able to place their name on the electoral roll at the age of 16 and vote in elections that occur no less than two years after they turn 16 will hopefully ensure that many more young people take an interest in the national affairs of the country.

The reduction in the material required as evidence of identity upon enrolment and upon change of name is a sensible move. People’s identities have to be proven in the first instance anyway, and I can think of no reason why people should have to continue, throughout their lives, to prove that they are who they say they are and time and time again.

I am very pleased by the changes in the legislation to the postal voting system. I know, from the hearings of the Joint Committee on Electoral Matters, that the member for Maranoa was very keen to see some serious changes there—particularly because of the remoteness of a number of his constituents. I note that a number of members of my extended family are constituents in electorates just like Maranoa.

Mr Slipper—And they probably vote for our side of politics.

Mr SULLIVAN—There is indeed a chance that they do. I think it is unsafe for the law to rely on the postmark of an envelope in deciding whether or not a ballot has been cast in time. The committee had a rather lengthy session with officers from Australia Post, who agreed that a letter posted in western Queensland may not be postmarked until it reaches Rockhampton a number of days later. That can cause valid votes to be excluded from the count, and that is a disenfranchisement of those voters. As I said earlier, many of the provisions in the legislation are to ensure that people are given the opportunity to vote. The capacity to apply online for a postal vote is another means of ensuring that these situations do not occur. Anyone who has experience in trying to contact known supporters who are overseas when an election is sprung on us would know that getting their postal vote application back from overseas, getting the ballot paper back to them and then getting their vote back in time is often quite a trying exercise.

The mobile polling consolidation makes a great deal of sense because it places in the
hands of local Electoral Commission officers the ability to determine when mobile polling will take place. That will address some anomalies in the system. One of the big problems I find is that too many government services in my area—and I am sure it is the same in everybody else’s areas—are controlled by black-and-white rules and local government services lack discretion. I am very pleased to support the fact that, in this legislation, we are giving some discretion to local offices of the AEC to make provisions according to what is going on in their local community.

In his contribution on the legislation, the member for Goldstein reserved most of his invective for the how-to-vote cards bill. Let us not beat about the bush—what occurred in South Australia has led to this. But let us not lose sight of the fact that it was not only the Labor Party that engaged in this kind of activity. Let us be quite clear about the activity that was engaged in in that election. Members of the Labor Party wore T-shirts of an unusual colour for the Labor Party, with a slogan printed on them that included the name of another party and handed out how-to-vote cards, properly authorised, that suggested how another party wanted people to vote. None of what was wrong in that circumstance is covered by this legislation.

Let us not be shy about it. The Labor Party were not the only people doing it in the South Australian election. Health Minister John Hill in the South Australian parliament the other day suggested that the Family First Party—the party who made the big song and dance about the activities of the ALP—also acted in a similar way by dressing their operatives in a T-shirt of a colour not normally associated with the Family First Party and by having slogans on those that were taken from union campaigns of recent times. I am not going to say that either of them was right or wrong, but a couple of interesting questions occur to me in all of this.

First of all, second preference cards have been around for years. As I look around the members gathered here, I suspect that I am not the only member of parliament who has used a second preference card. These usually came about when we were looking for preferences from a party who did not offer them in their how-to-vote card or who you felt might have been offering them to the wrong side. Let us use the Greens as an example. They usually started with something like, ‘If you are considering voting for the Greens, please consider giving your second preference to’—then insert the name of the major party that was distributing the card at the time.

Mr Slipper—Jon Sullivan.

Mr SULLIVAN—Or indeed Peter Slipper, as I have seen. This raises the question as to who owns that second preference. Certainly the Liberal Party does not own the second preference of anybody who votes 1 for the Liberal Party, nor does the Labor Party own the second preference, or the Greens or the Family First Party. The preferences are owned by the voter and the voter is entitled to get as much encouragement as he can get to place those preferences in a manner that he or she best sees fit. Clearly the voter owns their vote. I do not want to say too much because I know that there is an inquiry coming forward. We do need to make sure that, in placing that material in people’s hands, we do not engage in deceptive practices. In relation to that, these deceptive—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Coming from the Labor Party that is a bit rich.

Mr SULLIVAN—Madam, coming from you nothing would be too rich.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—
Mr SULLIVAN—I am going to tell the House about the first time I met you in Western Australia. You were a senator and we were at a conference for legislative scrutiny committees. I love this story because at the time you were being touted as a potential Prime Minister. You sat down at a table with four Labor MPs from Queensland and proceeded to tell us that Bob Carr would never be Premier of New South Wales because he was not good looking enough. I have never thought of you as anything but a lightweight since then. We need to be careful that we do not create—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz)—Order! The member for Longman will address his remarks to the core of the bill before the House.

Mr SULLIVAN—I am back to the bill, if you like, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—It is not if I like; I am instructing you to do so.

Mr Slipper—And his time is almost gone.

Mr SULLIVAN—The time is almost gone. I still have some white on the light. What I want to say is: we have a problem that we need to fix because it is deceptive practice. It is not fraud because it has been tested in the case of the South Australian election and found to be not contrary to the legislation. We need to fix it and make it sure. (Time expired)

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (6.18 pm)—I think it is enormously important for all of us, regardless of where we stand politically, to support the principle of the integrity of the electoral roll so that the people of Australia, when they vote at an election and a result is declared, receive the government for which they voted. The Liberal and National parties in government and in opposition have always supported the integrity of the electoral roll. Unfortunately, until amendments were made by the Howard government, we had an electoral roll that basically was based on the honour of those people purporting to vote.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I suppose I stand before you as a person who arguably was a victim of the lack of integrity of the electoral roll in the election when I was declared to be defeated by Michael Lavarch who was elected as the member for Fisher. At that time it was reported that during the period immediately prior to the election large numbers of nom de plumes were enrolled on the electoral roll, which meant that, because these enrolments happened so late in the day, there was no chance for the Australian Electoral Commission to check those enrolments. Consequently those nom de plumes were placed on the electoral roll and those nom de plumes allegedly voted.

There was an inquiry undertaken afterwards and it appeared that, for example, on Bribie Island—an area which is now represented by the honourable member for Longman—a substantial number of residents were enrolled to vote on both sides of a street called The Esplanade. The Esplanade has people living on one side of it and on the other side is the ocean. Yet the Electoral Commission did not have the facilities to inquire as to whether nom de plumes seeking to enrol were in fact entitled to enrol. There was no requirement to provide proof that one existed and there were suggestions that prior to the election a canvass was done and large numbers of people who allegedly lived in caravan parks were also enrolled to vote even though correspondence subsequently sent to those enrollees was returned unclaimed. So we had an electoral roll based on an honour system. While it would be wonderful to have a country where everyone, regardless of his or her political allegiance, was a person of honour, it is really important that we, as members of the Australian parliament, endeavour to ensure that the Elec-
toral Act includes provisions to guarantee—or come to as close as we can to guaranteeing—that the electoral roll on polling day is genuine and that we have in place procedures and processes which guarantee, as much as one can, that the result as declared following an election is the result for which the Australian people voted.

We are dealing today with four bills: the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010. As was indicated by the shadow minister and by his representative in this place, the provisions in this group of bills contain ideas that are good and positive and ideas which are negative and destructive and which militate against the integrity of the electoral roll.

Let me place on the record my admiration for the local officers of the Australian Electoral Commission in my division of Fisher. Over the years I have been privileged to represent this area of the Sunshine Coast region. I must say that I have been enormously blessed with the quality of the officers of the Australian Electoral Commission who have been based in the division of Fisher. I think it is really vital that, as much as possible, the divisional returning officer is actually based in an office geographically situated within the division for which he or she is responsible.

Turning to the bills before the House, the first bill I wish to refer to is the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010. It really is the responsibility of all Australians who are eligible to vote to join the electoral roll as soon as they are legally able to do so. I think it is important that the government makes sure that people are aware of their obligations to enrol and we ought to create in Australia a culture that people do enrol as soon as they are eligible. I know that there are provisions to extend the early enrolment to those aged 16 just to make sure that they are on the electoral roll if they happen to turn 18 by the time an election is called and that is a good measure.

However, I think that it is very unfortunate that the government is trying to undo the reforms of the former Howard government. The former Howard government made sure that there was a higher level of integrity in the electoral roll because of the early closure of the electoral rolls. That should not disadvantage anyone entitled to vote if that person had in fact followed the obligations of the law—namely, that that person enrolled to vote as soon as he or she was entitled to do so. Labor wants to return to the former arrangement whereby there are huge numbers, I think half a million in the last instance in 2004, of enrolments or new enrolments in the seven-day period before the close of rolls.

Such an arrangement is a rorters dream because, even if one accepts that the Australian Electoral Commission is honest and has a high level of integrity, there is no way it has the wherewithal or the resources to inquire and guarantee that the 520,000 people who enrolled in 2004 before the close of rolls were in fact eligible to be on the roll. I understand that in that situation lots of people were written to and many of those letters came back unclaimed. So one has to put a big question mark against whether the ALP has a vested interest in rorting, whether by returning to the former system this government wants to again steal an election by not making sure that we have integrity of the electoral rolls. In fact, as the shadow minister
pointed out, the scheme introduced by the former Howard government is some 40 per cent more effective than Labor’s in getting people onto the roll. We also made sure that there was a much higher level of integrity of the electoral roll, which is very much what all of us should be supporting.

It is the view of the Liberal-National opposition that, were the parliament to carry the proposal put forward by the government, it would in effect be a green light to those people who left everything until the last minute, those people who did not observe their obligation to get on the electoral roll and update their details so that when an election was called they were on the electoral roll at the correct address and were therefore able to vote. I might slightly digress at this stage without incurring your wrath, Mr Deputy Speaker, to say that I am a person who believes that in a democracy it is inappropriate for there to be compulsory voting. Although I do support the principle of compulsory enrolment to vote so that when the election day comes along, people are able to determine whether they support one side or the other or an independent. If they feel that nobody is worthy of their vote, they ought to be able to abstain.

Australia brought in compulsory voting at a federal level in 1924. It was rushed through the parliament in just a matter of a few hours with the suggestion that the compulsory voting arrangement would bring about, as I think someone said, a wondrous new understanding of our electoral system and how we are governed, with the implication that it would remove the level of ignorance and misunderstanding that we now have. I understand that Australia is one of only two English-speaking countries which actually do have compulsory voting. I think that it is the antithesis of democracy that after the 1993 election a substantial number of people were imprisoned because they chose not to exercise their theoretical right—which is not in fact enshrined in law—to vote. In other words, these people decided that no-one was worthy of their vote and they elected to vote with their feet by not going to vote. In many cases people who did not pay their fine were actually imprisoned. In my view, that is the antithesis of democracy, because in a democracy people ought to have the right to vote or not to vote as the case may be. However, Madam Deputy Speaker, the matter of compulsory voting or otherwise is not included in this debate, so I ought not tempt your wrath by proceeding further down that particular line.

The former government required that persons who claim a provisional vote at an election be required to produce evidence of identity—in other words, evidence that they exist and also evidence of their enrolled address—either on polling day or during a period of seven days following polling day. The Liberal-National opposition is opposed to any watering down of the requirements for proof of identity in relation to provisional voting. That is on the basis that it removes one of those disincentives for people to rort the electoral system by engaging in multiple voting. When I became interested in politics, I was told that Labor Party supporters liked to vote early and often. While I know many Labor Party people, like the honourable member for Melbourne Ports, who is sitting opposite, would not support any such arrangement, I think that, regardless of whether one considers that a political party has integrity or that its supporters have integrity, we ought to have enshrined in the legislation ironclad guarantees as to the integrity of the electoral roll, the electoral system and the voting process so that we are not dependent on the goodwill of people, regardless of the party that they support, to make sure that the electoral system and elections are not rorted. I understand that it is seen in the Aus-
The Australian community as being highly undesirable for the proof of identity provisions to be watered down. I hope that the government provision to give a green light to roters will in fact be rejected by the parliament.

There are matters that are supported by the Liberal-National opposition. For instance, the pre-poll votes bill will be supported by the Liberal-National opposition. Currently these votes are treated as declaration votes. It really does not make a lot of sense for this to occur. It seems to me—and I suspect other honourable members, regardless of the parties they represent, would confirm this—that as elections go on more and more voters, particularly elderly voters, seek to cast pre-poll votes. If a pre-poll vote is cast in an electorate it does make a lot of sense that the government is proposing to treat such votes as ordinary votes. That would mean that the count would be more streamlined. I cannot see that there would be any undermining of the electoral system were this to occur.

The Liberal-National opposition will also support the electronic updating of voter records. Indeed, the Liberal-National opposition will support a provision that only one nominee of each party should able to nominate in each seat. I do not agree with this provision that the opposition is supporting. I think that in a democracy if a political party wants to put up a couple of candidates, to allow the community to determine who ought to be the elected representative, then it should be a matter for the community and we as a parliament ought not be mandating against that particular requirement. The first Indigenous representative in the Queensland parliament, Eric Deeral, was elected in 1974 for the state electorate of Cook. He was one of two National Party candidates who were put up and obviously there were a multiplicity of other candidates. Through the preferential system Mr Deeral was the first Indigenous person to be elected as a member of the Queensland parliament. In the same election my former father-in-law, Max Hooper, who was previously the Independent mayor of Townsville, was one of two endorsed National Party candidates in the seat of Townsville West. The Liberal Party had a candidate, the Democratic Labor Party had a candidate and undoubtedly there were also other candidates. Through the preferential system Mr Hooper was actually elected as the member for Townsville West and subsequently served as the minister for marine services and fisheries in the National-Liberal government of Queensland.

So I do not see that there is any problem with a political party endorsing a couple of candidates. It might be that in some of these huge rural seats, where it is perhaps two or three thousand kilometres from one end of the electorate to the other, a political party, for geographic reasons, might want to put a couple of candidates up and they exchange preferences and the people determine who is actually elected. It does seem that I am very much in a minority here, because the government is putting forward a proposal that there should be a single nomination from each political party and the Liberal-National opposition appears to be supporting the government on this. I think that is regrettable. However, I suppose that there is nothing much that I as a single member am able to do about this and that, obviously, that particular proposal will pass through the parliament even if, hopefully, some of the other proposals put forward by the Rudd Labor government will not.

The member for Goldstein highlighted the important initiative of the former Howard government to give blind and vision-impaired people the opportunity to cast a secret ballot. It is a scandal that the current government—that is, the Labor Party government—has discontinued this on the basis
that it was too expensive. This provision in the bill is supported by the Liberal-National opposition on the understanding that this is only an interim arrangement ahead of further consultations which will be held with various community organisations. I just think, however, that if people are disadvantaged as far as their sight is concerned they—like you and me, Madam Deputy Speaker Bird—ought to be entitled to have a secret vote.

Time is short and I am not able, therefore, to address in detail the provisions of the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010. That particular bill has been well covered by the honourable member for Goldstein in his contribution. It is important, however, that the shams we have seen from the Australian Labor Party in South Australia and elsewhere are brought to an end. It is important that voters are not tricked. *(Time expired)*

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (6.38 pm)—I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak on this Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010 because in my view it balances our ethical duty in a compulsory voting system to ensure the maximum number of people participate in elections and at the same time to ensure integrity of the roll. I will return in a minute to the issues of the close-of-the-roll system Australians had always experienced prior to the last election and the requirements for provisional voters. This bill also modernises enrolment processes to enable voters to update their enrolment details electronically. It allows the AEC to manage its workload more efficiently by enabling enrolment transactions to be processed outside the division for which the person is enrolling. Those two elements are very important because, to our disgrace, the number of people participating in Australian elections has fallen over successive years as we have had this continuous roll update done electronically by the use of government databases to take people off the roll. Every member of parliament knows how this works. People are continually taken off the roll, as it is the right of the Australian Electoral Commission to do that; but we do not have a system for equally seeing that people do not drop off the roll before an election when they move to another address, when many people do not return the snail mail that is mandated by black-letter law.

From my point of view this bill does two things. Firstly, it restores the close-of-the-roll period to seven days after the issue of the writ for an election. Secondly, it repeals the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity before their votes are admitted to scrutiny. As honourable members know, I have been campaigning on these issues ever since the Howard government’s regressive and undemocratic amendments to the Electoral Act were implemented five years ago. This bill implements the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in its report into the last election.

On the first point, the bill implements one of the government’s pre-election commitments to restore the close-of-the-roll periods to seven days after the issue of the writ for an election. This amendment will provide sufficient times for new voters to enrol to vote in a federal election or for existing electors to update their address details with the AEC. In a compulsory voting system, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that as many people as possible who are on our electoral roll have the opportunity to enrol. That is what we used to do with the previous system of provisional voting and the previous system of a seven-day period of grace. Particularly as it affects younger people, I think what the previous government did was dis-
graceful because it meant many younger people—who may not have politics at the front of their minds when they are 17, 18 or 19 but who may be responsible enough when an election comes upon them to want to put themselves on the electoral roll—were systematically excluded by the previous government at the last election. These are the kinds of voters we should be least excluding. We should be encouraging young people to participate in the democratic system in Australia because—eventually even the Liberal Party will discover this—doing such things deauthorises democracy. We in opposition opposed the Howard government’s decision to restrict the time available to enrol when the election was called, and we said we would repeal this provision when we returned to government.

The second part of the bill repeals the requirement of provisional voters to provide evidence of identity. The Electoral Act currently specifies that a person who needs to cast a provisional vote at a polling place on polling day must provide officials with evidence of identity at the time of voting or by the first Friday following the polling date. If the elector does not provide evidence of such identity by the deadline, his or her votes will be not counted. What used to happen, by which each government was elected since 1996, was that responsible polling officials were able to get someone who had a change of address within that electorate to cast a vote, their vote would be put in an envelope, they would sign the outside of it, this would be compared by responsible electoral officials with their signature back at the electoral office and, if the signatures matched, they would be included. Again, the ethos was to include as many people as possible who had legitimately tried to exercise their vote. In a compulsory voting system, in a democracy like Australia, this should be our aim. The AEC estimated that over 27,000 provisional voters were excluded from the count at the 2007 elections due to the operation of this new evidence-of-identity provision. In accordance with the recommendations of the electoral matters committee, the bill repeals the requirement for voters casting a provisional vote to provide evidence of identity at the polling place and will instead insert the new requirement that, where there is any doubt as to the bona fides of the elector, the signature on the envelope containing the provisional vote be compared with the signature of the elector on the previously lodged enrolment record.

The previous speaker, the member for Fisher, said that this was to prevent rorts. The previous government was elected at every election—until they had control of the Senate in the period prior to 2007—with provisional voters being admitted to the roll like that. The member for Fisher is suggesting that there was something bodgie about the election of the Howard government between 1996 and 2004, because all of those provisional votes were included under that commonsense and fair system until then. In accordance with the recommendation of the committee on electoral matters, we are going to repeal that requirement.

When I first spoke on this bill earlier this year I said that it represents the fulfilment of commitments made by Labor at the 2007 election. It also keeps commitments that I made in 2005, when we presented the minority report of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. I said then that we would overturn the Howard government’s regressive changes to our electoral laws. This bill fulfils that commitment.

The changes made by the Howard government had the effect of disenfranchising tens of thousands of Australians at the 2007 election, which is exactly what I predicted would happen. At least 50,000 people who,
on the basis of past experience, we know
would have enrolled during the traditional
seven-day period of grace after the calling of
an election were prevented from doing so.
They were primarily young people, and, if
you study it, this has a permanent effect in
the electoral system.

Many more people were disenfranchised
when they changed addresses by being taken
off the rolls by the AEC and then deterred
from re-enrolling by the more onerous en-
rolment procedures. In 2004, 77,000 people
were added to the rolls after the close of the
rolls because they had been incorrectly re-
moved. In 2007 only 1,400 people were able
to be added. This was entirely due to the de-
liberate changes made by the Howard gov-
ernment.

The AEC estimated that 27,000 provi-
sional votes were excluded from the count at
the 2007 federal election due to the new
identity provisions but, in my view, the im-
 pact of the Howard government’s changes
was much greater than that. I estimate that
about 100,000 Australians were prevented
from enrolling or voting by the changes
made by the Howard government. What
happened was that, when people got to the
polling booths and saw that there were these
onerous requirements, they thought, ‘Go to
hell; I’m not going to participate.’ And they
did not—you can see from the fall in the
number of provisional votes in individual
seats that would previously have been cast.

The AEC’s report on the 2007 election
found that more than 27,000 provisional
votes were rejected because they did not
comply with the new requirements. The
number of formal provisional votes fell from
112,000 in 2004 to 42,000 in 2007—so, of
the 42,000 votes, 27,000 were rejected yet
the number of people applying for enrolment
died. Did the population of Australia
decline? No. Did the number of electors de-
cline? No. This was the effect that was delib-
 erately sought. A disproportionate number
of these voters would, I think, have been Labor
voters, and this was the motivation behind
these changes. In my view, if the number of
provisional voters in the 2004 election were
compared to the number in the 2007 elec-
tions, enough Labor voters were disenfran-
chised to allow the coalition to win at least
four seats—Bowman, Dickson, McEwen and
Swan—that they would otherwise have lost.

Professor Brian Costar, of Swinburne
University, one of Australia’s most respected
political scientists, told the Joint Standing
Committee on Electoral Matters:
I think a case can be made that it changed the
result … We know that provisional voters, be-
cause of their choice, are not a mirror image of
the electorate as a whole. They tend to be more
Labor and Green than they are Liberal, National,
or anything else.

I have yet to see any member of the opposi-
tion deny that this was the Howard govern-
ment’s intent. I do not say that all of them
knew that this was what they were doing, but
the hardheads in the Liberals who were be-
hind all of the salami tactics in changing
electoral law understood the intent of this.

The Howard government’s justification
for these measures was what they called the
‘protection of the integrity of the electoral
roll’. That was what they alleged in their ma-
jority report in 2005 and it is what they said
in their speeches but in fact there was no
evidence of any significant degree of elec-
toral fraud in Australian federal elections.
These claims were nothing but a fig leaf to
cover the coalition parties’ desire to rig the
electoral system for their own benefit.

Let me provide you with some well-
known figures to show the hollowness of the
opposition’s claims. There were 12.4 million
votes cast at the 2007 federal election. After
the election, the AEC identified 20,000 pos-
sible cases of multiple voting. That represented less than 0.2 per cent of all votes cast. Of these, 18,037—87 per cent—were found on investigation to require no further action. What happens is that often brothers, sisters, fathers, sons, mothers and daughters vote at the same electorate, and the electoral official, not hearing them in the rush of votes, crosses them off. Then the AEC, in comparing the votes later, works out that the officials have made a mistake and there has been no case of multiple voting.

Only 1,167 of the possible cases of multiple voting identified by the AEC in 2007 were found to represent actual cases of multiple voting. Of these 1,167, a total of 955—82 per cent—were found to be the result of confusion in the mind of elderly voters who voted once by post and again on polling day, having forgotten their earlier vote. There was no desire to rort the electoral system and no evil intent—it was a simple mistake that all of us have encountered among elderly voters in our electorates but it is not an attempt to rort the electoral system.

After the AEC’s exhaustive investigations, a grand total of 10 votes in the whole of Australia were found to have been deliberately cast more than once, and these cases were referred to the AFP for investigation. That is less than one vote in a million—a very striking figure. There can be few countries in the world whose electoral systems are as clean and as free from corruption as Australia’s, and that is something we should all be proud of.

So the AEC found that in 2007 there was no evidence whatsoever of any significant level of electoral malpractice. Even more remarkable was the fact that there was no substantial difference between the 2007 figures and those recorded at the 2001 and 2004 federal elections—in other words, the regressive changes made by the Howard government made no change to the level of electoral malpractice for the very good reason that there was no significant evidence of electoral malpractice to start with. That should not surprise us, because that was not the intent of the legislation; the intent was to create a partisan advantage. The Howard government knew perfectly well that their justification for making the amendments was spurious.

Mr Robert—Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: standing order number 90 is about reflection on members. The member is reflecting on and imputing improper motives to members.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—The debate is underway according to the normal procedures. I do not find that there is a point of order.

Mr DANBY—If the member recalls, I said there are many people here in this House, including him, I am sure, who were not aware of the intent of this legislation—of how this works on the ground—but the grand poobahs who were behind this legislation were aware of it.

In the AEC’s submission, it 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.

In 2001 the AEC said:

It has been concluded by every parliamentary and judicial inquiry into the conduct of federal elections, since the AEC was established as an independent statutory authority in 1984, that there has been no widespread or organised attempt to defraud the electoral system … and that the level of fraudulent enrolment and voting is not sufficient to have overturned the result in any Division in Australia.

The last time I spoke on this bill I quoted Emeritus Professor Colin Hughes, a highly respected former Electoral Commissioner,
and I think it is appropriate to do so again today. Professor Hughes wrote in 2005:

The thorough review of the electoral roll conducted in 2002 by the Australian National Audit Office 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.

This is a man who is revered by all sides of politics, who is an academic expert appointed by the previous government to many roles within the Electoral Commission and whose views should be listened to.

Let me return to the provisions of the bill. Schedule 2, part 1, item 2 inserts a new paragraph in the Electoral Act which is designed to reduce the number of provisional votes being rejected. It states that when a divisional returning officer examines the declaration envelope that contains a provisional vote, and where the DRO has some reason to doubt the signature on the declaration envelope is the actual signature of the voter, then the divisional returning officer may check the signature against the most recent record that contains the elector’s signature. Only if the divisional returning officer is of the view that the signature on the envelope and the signature on other records is not the same should the vote be excluded at this point of the count. That has been the system since at least the late seventies. This was a system that tried to incorporate and involve as many Australian citizens as possible. As I have said, we have a compulsory voting system in the democratic system: it is our ethical responsibility as democrats on all sides of parliament to include as many people as possible.

I understand in the Senate that some of the current opposition’s obsessions with integrity of the electoral roll are being addressed by an amendment that would allow the Liberals, without losing face, to keep their obsession with people producing photo identity at the polling booth but also give people the common-sense rights that they had and under which the previous government, the current opposition, was elected time after time after time.

This is a very important provision. We know from the evidence presented at many hearings of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters that the overwhelming majority of people casting provisional votes are genuine voters who are trying to cast a vote and have no intention of misleading or deceiving the returning officer. In nearly every case, when they have made a mistake in completing and signing the envelope, it is the result of inadvertence rather than malice. Many such voters are elderly, do not have a high level of education or may not have proficient English. It is not fair for their votes to be excluded because they made an honest mistake.

The provision will give the divisional returning officer the discretion to check the voter’s signature and make an independent judgment about the voter’s bona fides, rather than automatically excluding the vote. This will, I hope, reduce the number of provisional votes unjustly excluded from the count. The member for Fisher said that the period of grace that was given Australian voters when the writ was issued—that is, five working days after it is issued—and the previous system of comparing signatures for allowing provisional votes were ‘a rort’. I call them democratic necessity, ethical democratic behaviour and the kind of system that the previous government was elected under. I find it a great shame and a great traducing of Australian democracy that this issue has not been made more of and that the Liberal Party has been allowed to get away with this rort. What I fear is that, if people
who have gone to divisional returning officers and changed their electoral address were expecting to be able to vote via the provisional voting system and then become aware at election after election that they are going to be rejected, they will be ‘routinised’ into not trying to exercise a vote. This will be a great victory for the antidemocratic element in the previous government that tried to change this legislation for partisan ends.

As I have said before, this bill fulfils a Labor election commitment, and will help to make our already great election system even better—fairer, more open and more inclusive. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (6.58 pm)—I rise tonight to speak on this cognate debate of four bills, including the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010. The fact that we have four bills represents the first failure of leadership from this government in relation to the electoral reform measures that we see in front of us today. The member for Melbourne Ports spoke about the great shame of the Howard government in many of the measures that it sought to reform the Electoral Act, but the fact that we have such partisanship in relation to our electoral laws and in relation to many of the measures contained within these bills means that we are not meeting our fundamental responsibility as a parliament to ensure we have a fair and democratic system.

In fact, in reaching across to some of the speakers who have spoken in this debate, I would certainly reach out to the member for Longman. He came forward and stated that with all of his experience at elections, and he outlined some extensive experience, he would favour a vote card, a form of voter identification—that is, a voter identification card. I want it recorded that I want to reach out to the member for Longman and say that that is a very worthy idea. That is a missed opportunity within these bills. That is something that we have not seen brought forward by this government, and the fact that we have not, I think, underscores what is going on in many of the provisions within some of these bills before us tonight.

It is true to say that the integrity of the electoral system is paramount. It is not something that should be the subject of partisan politics. The public want to have confidence that if they are forced to attend a polling booth on polling day and cast a vote then they ought not to be at the mercy of those with malicious intent. They ought not to be at the mercy of those who have the goal of manipulating our electoral system—and there are those out there in our community who we have to assume will seek to manipulate our electoral system. Indeed, there are many notable examples and cases where people have attempted to manipulate the electoral system.

Some of the measures in these bills do have some merit. I am happy to say that and to extend my support for some of the bills that have been proposed. There are many measures in electoral reforms that both sides of this chamber can agree upon. In particular, I want to record my support for the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010. That seeks to allow the counting of pre-poll votes on election night. That is something that we all support and endorse. It also seeks to allow the AEC to better manage the workload of the state and divisional offices of the AEC. That is common-sense reform.

In particular I want to record my support for the measure to prevent parties from nominating more than one endorsed candidate for a particular lower house seat. I am a New South Wales member and witnessed firsthand the Bradfield by-election, where a
particular political party nominated multiple candidates—I think in the order of 11—for the same electoral division. We are all unenthusiastic about that outcome. We do not want to see any particular political party seek to manipulate the electoral process by nominating multiple candidates to confuse voters, to lift the rate of informal voting or to cause general disruption to the ballot system by extending the length and nature of the ballot papers. There are certainly some worthy measures in the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010. The fact that we have two or three bills that we can support and yet there are bills that we cannot support underscores that really we ought to seek a consensus before we move on electoral matters. Indeed, that would be a worthy goal of this parliament.

We can also support, however weak, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010. This is in response to the South Australian election, where we so recently saw an attempt to manipulate a democratic outcome of a state election. While it was not a federal election, all people interested in democracy and the fair and free flow of the democratic process would understand that by handing out Family First material in very questionable circumstances the Labor Party in South Australia, in particular, really put a severe question to the electoral system in Australia. We saw Labor people wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan ‘Put your family first’ handing out material. These people handed out what we would regard as misleading how-to-vote cards designed to get South Australians who were seeking to vote Family First to preference the Labor Party. There is nothing wrong with political parties seeking preferences, especially in a compulsory preferential system, as long as it is done so honestly, and clearly articulating that it is a particular political party seeking the preference of another political party. That is why it is easy to support this measure. The token approach within this particular bill—fines of $1,100—is regrettable, however. It could have been dealt with much more substantially. Most voters out there, when considering this bill or thinking about what it is intending to do, would feel short-changed if a political party sought preferences and did not clearly say what it was doing. Most voters would feel that we ought to prevent that in the electoral system. This bill would require all how-to-vote cards to have placed at the top of the card and in a prominent size the name and the party of the authoriser or face a fine of $1,100. A false authorisation would similarly incur a fine. That is worthy legislation and worthy of this parliament’s attention.

However, turning to some of the more controversial measures, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010 is something that we cannot support. It is something that I have particular concerns with. We heard the member for Melbourne Ports articulate a case that hundreds of thousands of young people were deliberately short-changed at the last election by the Howard government. At the last election I was contesting a federal election for the first time and I saw a greater emphasis being placed on the enrolment of young people that I had seen at any previous federal election that I had borne witness to as a voter. I do not think it is a bad thing that there was a campaign conducted by all sorts of people saying, ‘You’ve got to get on the roll; you’ve got to get out there and vote.’ That is a fine thing. That is the way it should be. But to say that it was somehow the intention of the Howard government to prevent a whole range of young people from enrolling to vote is something I reject and regard as false. It naturally
follows—and this argument has been made many times—that when you call an election you ought to prevent anybody seeking to engage in obtaining a large number of enrolments for anybody’s benefit for any reason. The roll ought to be consistently maintained and up to date and there ought not to be a penalty against those who maintain a correct enrolment at all times versus those who do not. If we are to be serious about future electoral measures and ensure we identify who voters are at polling booths, and if we are to have a system that has integrity and is above manipulation, then of course ensuring that the cut-off for people to enrol to vote prior to an election is not open to manipulation is something that is common sense.

The measures within this particular bill, seeking to close the roll seven days after the issue of writs in particular, goes back to that system which allows for that attempt at manipulation. I do not see that it disenfranchises young people at all. The member for Melbourne Ports had an odd construction on young people—that they do not have an interest in politics or voting. This is fairly typical of a Labor member of parliament’s approach to individualism. Every individual is different. Some young people have a passionate approach to politics, some have less passionate approach to politics and some have a combination. That is a matter for the individual. However, the electoral law requires that everybody over the age of 18 be on the electoral roll at their principal place of residence. We know that many people—in particular, young people—do not comply with that law in Australia. We ought not say that, if a person chooses not to comply with the electoral law, somehow they are worthy of an extension rather than all of those young people who go and take great care to maintain their enrolment from the day that they are able to enrol.

I find the government’s argument in relation to this odd. Yes, of course we want participation in our democracy. It is something that we all want to see in our democracy: greater participation and young people being enthused about politics and parliament. But it is not appropriate to say to all of those people who have correctly enrolled, ‘Now we are going to add an extension period for those who have not correctly enrolled.’ This is not for people who turn 18 within the extra week between the issue of the writs and the close of the rolls; this is not to get around a whole bunch of people who have been unfairly cut off from information or denied knowledge of our electoral system. In today’s society the opportunity for young people to enrol is the same as any age group. We should take measures to encourage all young people to be on the electoral roll and maintain the correct electoral enrolment, as we do all of our citizens.

The second measure that is quite difficult for the opposition to support is the removal of the requirement for declaration voters to produce identification. These are things we have always opposed. We have always supported the requirement for declaration voters to produce identification. Coalition members on the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters have rejected these proposals on the basis that we believe they substantially reduce the integrity of the electoral roll. I note that the member for Melbourne Ports also spoke to the Senate’s desire to ensure that voters’ signatures were matched by the divisional returning officers in the Electoral Commission. He reflected on the Senate’s will in that regard. We do not know what will happen in the other place yet except that there are proposals to amend this particular provision to ensure that there is matching of signatures. That reflects not just that this is a concern of the Liberal Party and the National Party but that there is concern
on the crossbenches and in other places that, if you are casting such a vote, the simple requirement that it be identified and verified adds that integrity that the member for Melbourne Ports was speaking about—but then, of course, he argued that we do not need it in this case. We would support any move to strengthen the integrity of the electoral system, particularly those around a greater identification of provisional voters.

I also want to record at this point that I certainly support greater measures in relation to the identification of voters at polling booths, particularly photo identification. Societies like the HS Chapman Society, who have many times approached me about matters that they are concerned about, have highlighted cases over the years where it could be demonstrated that there was untoward activity in our electoral system. In a society like ours, when you go to hire a video you have to produce photo identification and verification of your finances and your place of residence. Simple activities require the highest form of identification and yet for perhaps one of the most sacred parts of our democratic system, the right to vote, we do not require even the most basic level of identification at the point of voting. That is a very difficult thing for us to continue with into the future. Of course, in older democratic societies in ancient times the numbers of people were much smaller. People and families were more readily identifiable because of the system and the nature of our societies. In our complex and distant modern societies, where technology is often the prime motivator and mover in our society, it is not unreasonable to argue that technology should be used to enhance democracy so that we all have complete and utter faith in our system going forward.

There are other parts of these bills that can be supported. In particular, there are plenty of non-controversial features in the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010, including a move towards a more digital system of records management within the Australian Electoral Commission. It is similar to what I have been talking about in terms of the greater use of technology. This is the argument that I am making. Certainly in some of these bills, particularly the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill, there is this trend towards digital records and standardising practices in the management of the electoral roll—using technology in a way that will help us verify and make the process of voting simple, accessible and legitimate. They are things that we all in this place would seek to do.

There is a measure within this bill, however—the seventh measure, the provisions for homeless voters—the objective of which I find a little bit lost. The worthy nature of some of the intent behind this particular measure is lost in its actual application within this bill. There are concerns about item 9. The implication of this is that there would be no practical provision to ever remove an itinerant elector from the roll. We argue that you cannot do a habitation review on a homeless person. Under the current system, if a homeless person is unable to vote or does not vote in one election then they are removed from the roll. Under this provision, the repeal of 96(9)(a), you would see the situation where that would not happen and a homeless person would continue to remain on the roll, even though they had not voted, which would create a separation and a difference with other voters.

It just seems odd to me. Of all the priorities and problems that a homeless person would have—in particular, legitimate priorities such as the need for shelter and food, which are things that we ought to do more about in this place—this is really a lower
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order priority and an oddly designed measure. These are the sorts of things where partisanship ought not apply. We have a difficulty with this because it separates these particular voters from other voters. This is where more bipartisanship could produce a better result that all sides of the House could support.

There are more minor technical amendments within that particular bill that are easy to support, but, in general, the fact that we have this suite of bills before us today is regrettable. It is regrettable that we cannot all support electoral reform. Electoral legislation is a legitimate function of government. Some would argue that a prime function of parliament in a democratic society is to administer the electoral system and do it in a fair way, beyond partisan politics, and with integrity. I am happy to support some of the bills, as I outlined, but I have grave concerns about many of the measures contained in other bills, which we will oppose.

The ability of a third party to collect postal vote applications has been changed in what is the most unworthy measure within the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010. This goes to the heart of the partisan nature of this legislation and to the breakdown of any agreement in relation to this. The Labor Party has seen that one side has an advantage. It is not an advantage that is in the legislation itself. It is not an advantage that exists because of a law. It is just an advantage because of the construct of the Liberal and National parties. Unions are an advantage for the Labor Party—but we do not outlaw unions, because they conduct a legitimate and proper activity in a free society. So is the behaviour of collecting postal votes on behalf of people, to lodge with the Electoral Commission. It is not a process that the government maintains is open to corruption or fraud. It is not a process that it suggests has been misused. But the government is now seeking to bypass that system, purely for partisan advantage—underscoring what has happened in relation to these bills and why we have this cognate debate today. With those grave concerns and rejecting those measures which would undermine the integrity of the system, I conclude my speech on these bills today.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (7.17 pm)—I speak in support of the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010. I spoke earlier on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010. It is interesting, because those opposite are railing against so many of the provisions of this legislation. They are in favour of some modernisation, but conservatives, generally, have been opposed to the opening up of rolls which would allow people from all strata of life to vote. Conservatives through the Western world have always opposed that.

For much of the history of Australia, from settlement onward, we were in a situation where the average person could not vote. It was only from the beginning of the 20th century that we saw a situation where the average Australian could cast a ballot at a local, state or federal election. It was often without the requirement of a property franchise and often without the requirement of ensuring that the person was of the male gender. Women were not allowed to vote throughout much of Australia’s history as a colony and also at the beginning of Federation. Universal suffrage for adults was not something that conservatives in this country universally
supported. I am pleased to say that it is likely those opposite would now support the idea of universal adult suffrage, but it has not always been the case. Conservatives in this country have been opposed to many reforms, when it comes to electoral outcomes.

I come from the great state of Queensland, where the National Party, in particular, and the Liberal Party made gerrymandering and electoral maladministration an art form—where votes in rural areas had four times the value as votes in cities. With respect to this legislation before the House—

**Mr Robert**—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order, with regard to standing order No. 90, relating to reflection on members. The member is saying that rural members on this side of parliament gerrymandered votes by 400 per cent. To say that that is outrageous does not even come close!

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)**—The point of order has been made. The member will resume his seat. Firstly, I would point out that the member was talking about a different parliament and not this parliament and, secondly, I would point out that this is a normal process of debate. There is no point of order.

**Mr NEUMANN**—The coalition is always sensitive about this particular matter. The LNP in Queensland is particularly sensitive about this because of the zonal system that they introduced. At one time Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen was elected with 18 per cent of the primary vote. That is the extent to which they are involved in this process, so it is a bit hard to cop lectures from those opposite when it comes to alleged rorting. In 1983 we had dead people voting in elections when certain Liberals changed their enrolment—they ceased to be Liberals and became Nationals, to give Joh Bjelke-Petersen a majority. The truth is that, historically, in Queensland the coalition has made an art form of electoral rorting. That is the truth.

There is a bit of history to this and to what we are trying to address today. Let us have a look at the history. In 1996, the Howard coalition were elected to be the government of this country. They were re-elected in 1998 and again in 2001 and again in 2004. During that period, we did not see some great inquiry into electoral rorting or something like the Cole commission into this particular aspect of electoral law. What happened was that when they got control of the Senate they opportunistically changed the law to advantage them electorally. They closed enrolments early and made sure that proof of identity would be required in relation to provisional voting. Why was that? We have heard the perceptions and worries of the member for Fisher and the member for Mitchell over there about what will go on if we change these laws. You would think that since the seven-day closure of roll provision came in there had been some flurry of people giving false names and falsely enrolling. There is not a scintilla, a jot or an iota of evidence that that is the case. The truth is that the Howard coalition government opportunistically changed the laws with respect to this—changed the electoral process—to advantage them. Why did they do this? The truth is that history shows that provisional voting favours the Labor Party.

The amendments in these bills are important. But it is important to get to the reality of this. In 2004, the total two-party-preferred vote for Labor nationally was about 47.3 per cent. For provisional voting, the total was 53.5 per cent. In 2007, the two-party-preferred vote nationally for Labor was about 52.7 per cent. For provisional voting, the total was 60.9 per cent. You can see that, if they could reduce the number of people voting provisionally, it would advantage them. That is the truth. They knew that was
the case. That is why they set about reducing
the number of people who could vote provi-
sionally. There was a reduction of 73 per
cent in the number of people who could vote
provisionally. Putting proof of identity provi-
sions in the legislation was about advantag-
ing the coalition electorally.

In the Blair electorate—my electorate—in
south-east Queensland, in 2004, when I was
a candidate, there were 483 provisional votes
cast. When it became more difficult for those
with disadvantage, those who are poor and
those who may be itinerant to cast their
vote—when they put in place obstacles and
barriers to democratic participation—
provisional votes went down from 483 in
2004 to 99 in 2007. What they were con-
cerned about, obviously, was the high level
of Labor voters voting provisionally.

So let us not have all this self-
righteousness and sanctimony that we hear
from those opposite on this matter. Somehow
you would think that the Electoral Commis-
sion would not be able to cope. It was able to
cope with a seven-day provision in 1996, in
1998, in 2001 and in 2004. What was the
problem? They did not seem to have any
concern then. But they changed it for their
electoral advantage. Let us tell the honest
truth about this: that is what they did it for.
When they are over there complaining about
what we are doing here, they are just
whingeing, moaning and carping while try-
ing to disadvantage people who want to ex-
ercise their democratic right to vote and par-
ticipate in representative democracy but who
cannot do so because those opposite are put-
ting barriers in place. That is what this is
about. That is what they are trying to do.

We Australians are a socially mobile
group. One in five people, according to the
Electoral Commission, changes their residen-
tial address in the three years between fed-
eral elections. That means that they move.

Anyone knows that, when people move to a
new estate or move house, one of the last
things that they think of doing is changing
their enrolment. They change their electricity
account details; they change their licence
details; they change their details for their
doctor, dentist or accountant; they stop the
newspapers being delivered to their old
place. But electoral enrolment is often the
last thing that they think of.

You will see, for example, huge areas of
new estates across South-East Queensland—
and we get these things from Electrac. There
is one particular part of my electorate in
which there are new houses going up every-
where. There are 256 people on the electoral
roll in this CCD, the suburb of Springfield
Lakes in my electorate, which is being redis-
tributed to the electorate of Blair. I had a
mobile office there the weekend before last.
There are houses everywhere—hundreds and
hundreds of houses. There are many new
people coming into the area. Obviously, the
number of enrolments is not keeping up with
the number of people moving to that estate—
that is clear.

If you do not think that that is the case
with respect to South-East Queensland, you
should have a look at the redistribution fig-
ures. In 19 February 2009, the quota was
struck for redistribution. Queensland beat
New South Wales in the State of Origin, and
we will do it again on Wednesday night, and
we beat them in the Electoral Commission:
they lost a seat to us. We go up to 30 seats
and New South Wales goes down to 48 at the
next election. That is based on population.
That is what the Electoral Commission looks
at: the ABS data from different states. It
looks at the population 13 months after the
recall of parliament after the election.
Queensland needed to get an extra seat and
New South Wales needed to go down.
The interesting thing is that enrolments are not matching population growth. That is why it is important that these provisions go ahead. The quota struck in New South Wales for the 48 seats was 94,353 electors. In Queensland, it was only 88,343, which justified the increase in seats. Clearly, enrolment is not matching. That is the evidence that was given to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. At the 2007 federal election, more than two million of the 13.3 million votes were early votes. There were 1.1 million pre-poll votes and 830,000 postal votes.

The interesting thing in relation to all of that was the number of people who did not cast a ballot or were not on the roll. One of the things that was clear was that there were about 1.2 million Australians who should have been on the roll but were not. So those who are on the roll are deciding to cast their vote early, and that is an increasing trend with prepoll, postal and provisional votes, but the enrolment is not catching up with the growth in population, particularly in states such as Queensland. Socially mobile Queenslanders who should be on the roll are not. Giving people the opportunity when the election is called to think, ‘I’d better change my enrolment—I’ve just moved into Springfield Lakes where I’ve built myself a new house, so that’s a good idea to get on the roll,’ is a sensible reform that will increase the participation of Australians in the electoral process. I cannot see how that could possibly be about trying to rort the system. I cannot see how, with the Australian Electoral Commission universally accepted as an institution of integrity and real competence and effectiveness, that could possibly be considered to be Labor trying to undermine the electoral process. I think it is really about participation. It is about improving the situation for Australians.

Senator Joe Ludwig, the Cabinet Secretary and Special Minister of State, issued a press release on 2 June 2010 in which he said:

These bills remove a range of barriers which currently make it unnecessarily difficult for citizens to exercise their democratic right to vote.

Sure, there are some modernisation provisions. Sure, the legislation addresses issues in relation to the circumstances in the recent South Australian state election. I think the provision which aims to ensure that electors know on whose behalf a how-to-vote card has been distributed is an important reform. People want to know, when they go to the ballot box and are given a how-to-vote card, who is giving them that card and on whose behalf it is being offered. That is important.

The significant change to modernise enrolment arrangements and reduce the age of provisional enrolment from 17 to 16 years is a good thing. As members of parliament we go to citizenship ceremonies in our electorates all the time and see the AEC fulfilling their role by getting new Australians on the electoral roll. But we also see them at speech nights and graduation ceremonies at high schools and in shopping centres across the whole country taking steps to ensure that young people get on the roll. Young people often do not get on the roll until an election is called. They are often motivated to do so because they realise it is the first time they can cast a vote. Not every person over the age of 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 or even over the age of 18 years is a political junkie like most of us here in this parliament, who live and breathe and die by politics and are interested in it all the time. They are interested when an election comes around and they have a chance to exercise their democratic right to vote. On a number of occasions I have seen young people come to the ballot box with a camera and ask someone to take a picture of them outside the polling booth because they are casting their vote for the first time. They
see that as an important rite of passage, like getting a drivers licence or graduating from high school. It is important for young people to be able to do that, so anything that allows and encourages young people to get on the roll to vote is important. The seven-day grace provision is important in that regard.

What we need to do in this country is increase our citizenship and civic responsibility education. That is very important. I think we are failing in that. I do not think we have adopted what I would consider a 21st century response to making sure our citizens choose to participate the way they should. We need to take steps to encourage our young people to be involved in this. The facts are that the seven-day period allowed hundreds of thousands of people to re-enrol. They were not able to do so because of the Howard government’s cut-off provisions which guillotined the franchise straight after an election was called.

I think these provisions restore integrity to the electoral process. They rid the electoral process of unnecessary barriers to people participating. They get rid of many of the burdens and irregularities and difficulties that people face in a very socially mobile country like Australia. The range of measures we are bringing in here are important to modernise our response. Keeping enrolment up to date is critical in a democracy. I applauded the AEC for the work they do, but there is more to be done. These reforms are important from the first point to the last. It is a disgrace, in my opinion, that the coalition cannot fully support every single one of them.

Mr SECKER (Barker) (7.35 pm)—I rise to speak tonight on these four bills: the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010. It is always very interesting to follow the member for Blair, who always has an interesting, shall we say, take on history. He suggested that the coalition in Queensland gerrymandered boundaries, but forgot to mention the historical fact that it was Labor who started all of this in Queensland. Bah, humbug, Member for Blair! Bah, humbug! These bills are about the electoral roll and election practices. This is very important legislation because the government is trying to pass legislation that reduces the integrity of the electoral roll, which is never a good thing.

I find it interesting that members from the government are saying that we have to have seven days to allow people to enrol. If you look at the figures and what Labor is trying to take us back to, you see there were 167,000 people who did not enrol at the 2004 election but, when we tightened it up for the 2007 election, there were actually only 100,000 that did not get their names down on the roll. So it is not about whether you have seven days to enrol; it is about having a good advertising and promotion program to make sure that young people, especially, enrol to vote. It is also important to recognise that with those changes we brought in you can do a pre-enrolment three months before you turn 18, so if you are keen you will do that.

The Australian electoral laws are in place so that a level playing field can be established and an open and transparent political system that reflects the Australian voters can be retained. Earlier this year my home state, South Australia, held their state election. As many people would know, there was speculation about fraudulent voting and dodgy practices. Results in many of the seats were very close, and it is at times such as these that it is
more important than ever for the process to be accountable and fair.

Unfortunately at this year’s South Australian state election the ALP breached moral ground and did something that fundamentally ruins the trust voters have in political parties to do the right thing at election time. It was unethical. It sought to confuse voters. It sought to trick voters, and it was just plain wrong. Impostors, some even sourced from interstate, turned up to the polling booths dressed in misleading T-shirts that said, ‘Put Your Family First,’ and then proceeded to hand out how-to-vote cards which directed voters to award their second preference votes to Labor, when in fact Family First had made Labor their sixth preference. The how-to-vote cards carried the Family First logo and to the none-the-wiser voter, looked to be authentic. Only the fine-print endorsement gave away that they were not in fact produced by Family First, and very few people saw that.

This was trickery at its worst. Faced with the possibility that the race was going to get tight, the Labor Party clutched at straws and then decided to play it dirty. This was on top of leaving the issuing of the writs to the very last moment to make it harder for voters to get the postal vote applications back in time. These dirty tricks are not welcomed by the coalition and it is a real show of character that they were not in fact produced by Family First, and very few people saw that.

I note that the member for Longman stood up in this place tonight and said, ‘Labor weren’t the only ones doing it.’ I find this a very poor excuse for very poor behaviour anyway, but he could not point to any examples of where the Liberal Party had been involved in that sort of deception. It is really nothing out of the ordinary for the ALP to stoop to this sort of level. In the extremely tight 1993 election the ALP posed as Democrats to secure preferences, and in the 1998 Queensland election they posed as One Nation. It is an utter disgrace, and tactics like this just show how juvenile and dirty the Labor Party is.

When first elected in 2002, the South Australian Premier, Mike Rann, introduced a ministerial code of conduct that prominently featured party representational behaviour at all times. Like his federal counterpart, he seems keen on backflips as, although silent on the Family First impostors, it can be said that nothing speaks louder than silence. With the federal election looming, this is what we can expect from the Labor Party: for them to revert to their nasty impersonation habits to get extra votes that they cannot earn from their own merit.

After the absolutely disgraceful handling of the issue by the state divisions of the Labor Party, Mr Rudd decided he would step in. This legislation is his answer to the problem: a quick sweep under the floor and all is fixed. That is how Labor fixes everything. The coalition supports measures to ensure how-to-vote cards remain transparent and clearly indicate which political party the card is representing. However, the Prime Minister’s proposed legislation that stipulates exactly how and where and what size the political party’s name must be on the card is a little over the top. All or nothing—that is the Labor way.
In stark contrast to that bill, the next bill seeks to open the door to fraudulent voters. The logic is breathtaking. The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010 is the controversial half of the old bill that was split in half after coalition protest. The two measures contained in these bills are, firstly, to seek to close the rolls seven days after the issue of writs and, secondly, to remove the requirement for declaration voters to produce ID. So in fact it would be easier to get a vote at the federal election than it would be to get a DVD from your local DVD store. Firstly, this does not allow time for the Australian Electoral Commission to check the legitimacy of the voter—and that was a concern that they raised—and, secondly, it allows impostors to vote. Shame on you, Labor! The Labor government are seeking to reduce the integrity of the electoral roll and they are also opening the door to fraudulent voters.

There was more controversy at the South Australian election. At the election one family voted not once, not twice, not three times, but 159 times! A letter published claimed the frauds were from a group of siblings calling themselves ‘The Election Team’. They said they committed the fraud in two marginal seats to make a point about poor identity checks and other problems with the Electoral Act. They certainly showed that up.

Labor want this to continue; they are more than happy to introduce legislation that would take away the accountability of the electoral roll. So, the federal government has decided to take action. Kevin Rudd on the one hand makes legislation to stipulate how political party names are placed on how-to-vote cards but then on the other hand, instead of addressing problems allowing fraud to occur, he makes it easier for it to happen. Encouraging fraudulent voting is a blatantly wrong activity to endorse. The Prime Minister has no problem with endorsing dodgy practices—the home insulation disaster and BER cost blow-outs come to mind. This is just another piece of legislation that is poorly thought through with no consideration about the consequences it may have—or perhaps it was thought through, with a view to giving them an electoral advantage.

I cannot support legislation that encourages fraudulent voting, and I cannot believe the other side is willing to reduce the integrity of the electoral roll. The amendment the coalition is supporting is one moved by Senator Nick Xenophon. It would require every signature on a provisional vote envelope to be compared with the elector’s original signature, thereby preventing fraudulent votes being accepted into the tally and providing evidence, if there is any, of attempts at fraudulent voting. I support this measure; I support open and transparent processes and a level playing field. The Rudd government must do the same. The government must support fairness at election time and must not encourage practices that are dodgy and immoral and unethical.

The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 contains mostly amendments that we are in support of but I note there are some that we oppose. One of these measures that we do not support is in schedule 6, which contains a controversial addition by the Labor government—postal vote applications can only be returned directly to the Australian Electoral Commission, which bypasses party collection, and the attachment of extra material on a PVA form is prohibited. The Liberal and National federal directors are strongly opposed to both these parts of the measure. The seventh measure, item 9, also cannot be supported by the coalition as it is concerning that there is no practical provision to ever remove an itinerant elector from a roll. We must have those sorts of practical measures available.
We are arguing against some of the measures in these bills and that is because we simply cannot trust this government to get it right. Any changes to weaken the electoral roll weaken the fundamentals that make it strong in the first place. If you make provision for trickery and fraudulent practices then you take away what makes Australian elections open and transparent. We do not believe the Rudd government can be trusted; we do not believe they can get it right, because they have got it wrong so many times before. That is one of the reasons we are opposing these measures.

Labor has a strong record of trying to rig the voting system by impersonation of, in turn, the Democrats, One Nation and Family First. Labor wants to reduce the voting age to get an advantage; Labor wants to keep its advantage with compulsory voting and its inherent donkey vote, when voluntary voting is the norm in other countries, including our neighbour New Zealand. They do quite fine with that system. With voluntary voting you actually have to convince voters that you are worth their support. With compulsory voting, you do not. If we want real electoral reform, it is my belief we should go to voluntary voting. However, this is not even addressed in these bills.

Australia has a proud tradition of voting integrity that is only abused by Labor. Indeed the secret ballot was invented in Australia, and in many of the states in the United States of America the secret ballot is called the Australian ballot. But we have seen Labor with a long history of fraud in elections, a long history of deceptions in elections—this is Labor’s way. We should all remember when Mike Kaiser was sacked from the Queensland parliament for his role in fraud with respect to branch stacking. We also know that he was appointed to an unadvertised position with the National Broadband Network at a salary of some $450,000. Not bad for a fraudster. Labor has form on this, and it is no wonder that we do not trust Labor with electoral changes. That is why we cannot agree to these four bills.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (7.49 pm)—I support the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill and cognate bills for many reasons. Amongst those reasons, which I will enumerate, I will principally discuss how the bill recognises the need for people with impairment to be given greater support in their participation in elections. I do this because one of the frustrations of having an impairment is the fact that you are constantly dealing with systems that are designed as if you did not exist. Doors that are too narrow for a wheelchair, workplaces that are not equipped for your needs and a hundred other small variations and obstacles are a constant reminder that when you have a disability you are the exception; you are treated as the square peg that will not fit in the round hole. This is often a reminder that practical equality is still a long way away for many of our Australians who live with impairment.

When we witness this unending struggle with a world that is all too often indifferent to the needs of people with impairment, a world that wastes the time and drains the energy of people with disability, and when you can also see how often these problems could be avoided with a little bit of thought or creativity, I can understand why the frustration of people with disability increases tenfold.

I will return to this theme, but there are many other good things in these bills. We are reducing the age of provisional enrolment from 17 to 16. We are introducing provisions to make it easier to enrol, and keep on the
electoral roll, people who are homeless—a matter that I know is very dear to the heart of the Minister for Housing, who is in the chamber. We are making it easier to apply for a prepoll or postal vote. We are limiting political parties to one endorsed candidate in each electorate to stop flooding of the ballot paper and the confusion of voters. We are removing the bizarre provision brought in by the previous government that the electoral rolls closed the day an election was called, and are restoring the seven-day enrolment period, which will allow more people to exercise their right to vote. Shutting down the electoral roll at the very time people were most interested in getting onto it and ensuring their addresses were correct was a shabby piece of political manipulation by the previous government, now the opposition, and it is only right that this be corrected.

But, as I said, I want to focus on the fact that these bills, for the first time, give the right to a secret ballot to people who are blind or have impaired vision. If you told the average Australian that there was a group of 300,000 people who did not have the right to a secret ballot in this country, they would be shocked. I think they would also struggle to identify the group, which is often the case when we fail to realise that not everyone possesses the abilities we take for granted.

While people with impaired vision have the theoretical right to cast a secret ballot, and have done since 1902, in practice this right has not existed. Australia was the first country to introduce and make standard the secret ballot—we did that in the 19th century—and we were also the first country to guarantee the right of the blind to vote. But somehow we have not quite connected the two things in practice. For over 100 years intelligent, sensible men and women with strong opinions on how this country should be run have been forced to get the help of a friend, or of an electoral officer, to fill out their ballot. This is a patronising and demeaning situation which unfortunately reinforces the inappropriate second-class status that people with impaired vision are often treated as having in our society.

In 2007 the Australian Electoral Commission ran a trial of electronic voting. This proved extremely popular with people with impaired vision. Graeme Innes, the Disability and Race Discrimination Commissioner, has spoken of his delight at finally, at the age of 50, being able to cast a secret vote through this process. The trial has been considered since then as a very costly exercise and a decision was made not to repeat it at this election. The cost was $2,500 per vote cast in the trial locations, although I believe this would come down if the scheme were extended more broadly. However, the government has moved to legislate to authorise the Electoral Commission to facilitate secret ballots for people with impaired vision.

In the next federal election—whenever that is—voters with impaired vision will be able to ring a call centre and have their vote processed anonymously. This measure will be reviewed after the election and the Australian Electoral Commission will work to improve the system in future elections and ensure that the best and most contemporary technology is used to help people with impaired vision exercise their democratic right. I want to congratulate the Australian Electoral Commission on their work in this area and their recognition that the right to vote, and to vote in secret, should not depend on your impairment.

As we work towards ensuring that people with impairment have equal participation, the Australian government is developing a national disability strategy, which aims to improve the inclusion of people with disability in all areas, and the work of the Austra-
lian Electoral Commission fits admirably within this goal.

But I want to note that I think there is more that the AEC could be doing to guarantee access to polling places for people with impaired mobility and to ensure that voting booths themselves can be accessed by as many people as possible.

I know, as do all members of the House, that votes are cast across Australia in a wide variety of buildings and that without fixed terms the Australian Electoral Commission is hamstrung in what it can do in picking the same buildings with the right disability access on all occasions. But the right of people with disability to be able to enter a polling place with ease and dignity needs to be encouraged.

Australia is one of the oldest members of the global family of democracies. We have a system of compulsory voting—or, to be precise, compulsory attendance at the polling booth—which does seem unusual to some visitors to our country. But I believe that it is as uniquely and importantly Australian as our coat of arms. It is a way of ensuring that every government elected can rightly claim the support of the majority of the population.

This contrasts positively with the great United States of America, where, despite its many strengths, congressional representatives or senators win office in elections where less than 50 per cent of the adult population votes. I believe the drift away from people voting in elections can only be a negative in any democracy and weaken the faith of the people in their political system. Democratic societies create responsibilities as well as rights. I believe one of those responsibilities is participation in elections. But this creates a responsibility for governments to preserve the right to vote by making the practice of voting as easy as possible.

These bills hold up our end of the bargain by giving people who cannot see the right to a secret ballot. The prejudices and barriers faced by people with disability are entrenched, systemic and subtle. They are embedded in all too many of the systems and institutions of our society.

I believe it is not the disability or impairment of the voter that is the problem; the rest of society’s inability to deal with it constitutes the real barrier. This legislation shows that when the will and desire to remove a barrier is there, that barrier can be removed. This measure is in some ways a small one but it is one of the many small battles that need to be won in the greater fight to remove inequality for people with disability.

This legislation contains the values of the Rudd government in their commitment to upholding and strengthening the rights of people with disability. It reaffirms our belief that the entire community has a duty to take the reasonable steps that are required to deliver equal access to people with disability. I understand that we may not be able to immediately change people’s negative attitudes towards disability. But we can ensure that people with disability are given the opportunity to achieve their potential and to be included in society in all areas, including the right to vote. By doing so, we change attitudes in the long term.

It is important to note in any discussion about this legislation and its improvement for access for people with disability that there are two million Australians with a severe or profound disability, or who are primary carers of people with disability. This legislation is part of the government’s general values of advancing the case for disability. Consistent with that is the same set of values which have seen the referral of a national long-term care and support scheme to the Productivity Commission to investigate.
Such a scheme has the potential to change the way disability is supported in this country just as this legislation tries to change the way that people with vision impairment are encouraged to participate in the elections. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (7.58 pm)—I also rise to speak on these four bills: the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010. These are very important bills to ensure that our democracy remains strong, that the integrity of our electoral roll remains and that we can continue to have successful and corruption-free elections—and we face one in the very near future.

I think we should be very proud of the system we have built in this country over a long period of time. As Parliamentary Secretary Shorten talked about in his contribution before me, we do have a proud history in Australia of having an electoral system of great integrity. The occasions when election results have been questioned have been very rare; there have of course been some but none were examples of enormous voter fraud, or electoral fraud, in our country. If we compare ourselves to some of our democratic friends, we can be proud of our record. Anyone who is interested in United States history, as many of us in this place are, will remember some examples of questionable results in their past—something we in Australia have not faced, which is a very good thing. We should continue to maintain the integrity of our electoral roll, and I believe very much that we must always protect the roll and our electoral system, especially from weakening it to the point where it can be misused or corrupted in any way. So the bills before this House are very important and we should treat them as such.

It was disappointing, though, that the Rudd government originally decided to introduce bills that combined controversial aspects of electoral reform with non-controversial aspects of electoral reform, a practice which is unusual in this place. It is usual to split the bills. There is some controversy over policy decisions rather than the mechanics of how the electoral roll operates. So it was pleasing that the Rudd government took our advice in the end and split these bills into the four separate bills we are dealing with this evening in this cognate debate.

The main bill, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, contains the most controversial aspect of the original bill before it was split. The coalition continue to oppose these measures for very good reasons. The government is seeking to overturn the move introduced by the previous government to close the roll at 8 pm on the day the writs are issued. The very good reason we oppose it is that the reform brought in by the previous Howard government has worked, in the sense that it reduced quite significantly—from a comparison of the 2004 and 2007 elections—the number of people ‘missing’ from the electoral roll at the election. This is a measure which has worked. It protects the integrity and adds to the strength of our roll, and that is why we will maintain our opposition to the Rudd government trying to overturn this decision. It will put into question the integrity and the accuracy of the roll and it will open up the possibility of fraudulent enrolments in very tight marginal seats. Of course, coming into a very close election like this one will most probably be, we want to ensure that the electoral roll information is
absolutely spot-on so that the government has complete legitimacy to make decisions, important decisions—like great big new taxes on mining—when it is elected. So we maintain our very strong opposition to this provision.

We also oppose the reduction in the identification requirements of provisional voters, again to protect the integrity of the roll. We believe very strongly that our system needs a corruption-free electoral roll and we do not support any measures which reduce the protections of that roll and increase the possibility that it can be rorted in any way. So we do not support this measure. Provisional voting is a small subsection of our voting system; however, we think that we need to have not-too-onerous requirements for producing identification. It is something I believe should be added to the system much more broadly. To add an additional strength to our system, we should have much more of a requirement to produce identification to prove who people are. I think it is right and proper, and it gives an additional strength to the electoral roll and its integrity.

We are in large part supporting the second bill, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010. We are in large part also supporting the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010, summarised as the modernisation bill, except that we do not support the provisions in relation to the postal vote applications going directly back to the AEC. This prevents parties from having the opportunity to add how-to-vote cards or additional material to the postal vote application. This, I think, is an attempt by the Labor Party to reduce a strength of the coalition, which has been to very efficiently and properly process postal vote applications, which means we have done better out of the postal vote system than the Labor Party have. Instead of trying to improve their campaigning systems, the Labor Party are trying to ban us from having that advantage. That is very typical of the Labor Party: where there is an advantage to someone else they will try and ban it; where there is an advantage to them they will try and drive a semitrailer through it—for example, union donations, which of course are so enormous these days that they very much call into question the system itself. I think there was $60 million before the last election, from wholly owned subsidiaries of one section of Australian society. That is a problem I think we have in our electoral system—absolutely something which should be addressed at some point in time.

I think a failing of the Howard government—if I can say that—was that we did not address election funding, we did not address the millions of dollars being spent on election campaigns and we certainly did not address the outrageous campaign contributions by one section of Australian society: the trade union movement, who wholly and solely fund the Labor campaign and their own campaign, which backs up Labor’s as well, with massive amounts of money. We will see that in the coming months as we head into the next election. The Labor Party are in trouble and it will be a very tight election. We will see this Labor Party outspend the coalition by most probably four to one, largely fuelled by the massive union donations they get. The unions do not seek permission from their members to do so; they just hand it straight over to the Labor Party.

We do not support the provisions in the modernisation bill. While we support many of the measures in the bill and agree with bringing a modern approach for the AEC into the system, we do not support the sixth measure in that bill.

The third bill is I guess an attempt by the Labor Party to hide its shame over what it
did in the South Australian election. David Nason in the Australian wrote:
Democracy was seriously diminished by this low exercise and those behind it ... should feel ashamed.

He wrote that two days after the South Australian election, on 20 March this year. As the House is aware, the Labor Party in key marginal seats got their campaign workers to dress up and act like they were Family First booth workers. Many were shipped in from Queensland and other places. In fact, the partner of one candidate was photographed with this T-shirt on, but he denied that he knew that that actually occurred in his seat of Mawson. The T-shirts were blue, which is the Family First colour, and had printed on them ‘Putting your Family First’, which is the Family First slogan. They handed out false, deliberately misleading how-to-vote cards which had changed the order of the preferences that were to be allocated by Family First. Family First had preferred the Liberal candidate, but instead the cards preferred the Labor candidate.

It was an absolute disgrace. The tactic was authorised and endorsed by Michael Brown, the South Australian State Secretary of the Labor Party, so you can bet your bottom dollar that it was endorsed, authorised, supported and encouraged by Premier Mike Rann and the highest levels of the Australian Labor Party. I note that the Australian Labor Party have not ruled out using this tactic federally. The provision in this bill is a weak, insipid response to what was an absolute and utter disgrace. It was the lowest act we have seen in an election for many years, certainly since brown paper bags have been around.

In addition to that you had the tactic of registering with Australia Post the South Australian Leader of the Opposition, Isobel Redmond. They used these low-rent tactics because they were so desperate to hang onto power. They chucked out morality to win. That is the modern Australian Labor Party. They will do anything. They will climb through any sewer and use any tactic they have to to win an election. In this case they were well behind in the lead-up to election day and they used every tactic in their marginal seats to win.

They scraped over the line with less than 50 per cent of the vote. Some people say that that means it is an illegitimate government. I do not agree with that. You need to win 50 per cent plus one of the seats. That is our system. The two-party preferred is an indication about where people want their government to come from; however, that is not our system. Our system is based on how many seats you win. However, I say the Rann government is illegitimate in that it used tactics like the Family First how-to-vote cards. That makes it completely illegitimate. It is an illegitimate government because it defrauded the Australian public. It intended to. It deliberately went about using this absolutely outrageous tactic. This low-rent tactic lowers the level of our democracy.

It should never have come from a major party in this country. Of course, parties on the fringes in this country have in the past done things at polling booths which we would never agree with, but that is what happens when you are a fringe party or a fringe element in our political system. But never before has a major party stooped to such levels, to such low-rent tactics, to slip through and hold onto an election. It is an illegitimate government led by an illegitimate Premier who should go. Of course he will go shortly. It was reported in the Advertiser today that he will be out of the state by Christmas and off to some appointment if the federal Labor Party gets re-elected. You can be sure of that.
This modern Labor Party, who pretend to believe in democracy, will use any tactic and will throw morality out of the door to win an election. I would not be surprised if we see similar tactics used and authorised by their national secretary in the federal election campaign coming up. That is the level the Australian Labor Party have got to. Their response in this bill is so insipid. It is purely public relations media spin to try to appear like they have acted on their own disgraceful behaviour, their own disgraceful tactics, which should never have been endorsed or allowed.

All credit goes to Chloe Fox in Bright. She held on by about 50 or 60 votes in the end. When she got the call from Michael Brown she said: ‘That is too low rent for me. I will not do that. I would rather lose than sell out my principles.’ It is unfortunate that more of those on the other side do not have the strong principles that Chloe Fox did in ensuring that she did not act in that manner. She refused to use that tactic.

The response in this bill in my view is completely insipid. The Labor Party lowered our democracy on the day of the South Australian election. They did it purely to hang onto state government. They did it because they were so desperate to hang on and were so out of touch that the South Australian people wanted them gone that they had to find any way, any gutter to crawl down, to hold onto government, and that is what they did. It makes them illegitimate.

Any Labor Party member who stands up in this place and pretends that they believe in democracy and pretends that they believe in protecting our electoral system, should distance themselves from the tactic used by Mike Rann and his cronies in South Australia. They should also rule out using it later this year because the Labor Party will use any tactic to hold onto government.

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS—It is insipid, member for Banks, and you know that. You know that what they did in South Australia was a disgrace and you would not have agreed with it. It is an absolute and utter disgrace, and this is an insipid response. There should be a much stronger response than this. It should be ruled out completely and your national secretary should rule it out being used this year.

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS—Give me a break—a $1,100 fine would be a union whip-around. This is an insipid response which should be stronger, and that is my very strong view on this. It was a deliberate tactic used at the booth and authorised by the state secretary of the Australian Labor Party, and you can bet your bottom dollar that it was authorised at higher levels than that. We need to see it ruled out before the next election because the Australian Labor Party will use any tactic. We have already seen the campaign start with negative ads about the Leader of the Opposition. It will be a purely personal, negative campaign just as they ran in South Australia and they will crawl along any gutter to hold onto government.

I support moves in this place to protect the integrity of the electoral roll and our electoral system. We have a very proud record in this country. We should be extremely proud of the fact that we are largely corruption-free particularly at federal elections. We have an election nearly upon us, which will be very tightly fought. I believe that one of the great aspects of our democracy is that the government that wins the day will have a mandate and support of Australian people because they trust the result.

I give credit to the AEC for the role that they undertake. It is a difficult role and they need support. There are, of course, always
difficult and close ballots and we need to ensure that our electoral roll and our electoral system are very well protected. Acts such as handing out fake how-to-vote cards and dressing up as someone you are not to try and fraud someone else into an election outcome they do not want should never be supported. It should be completely ruled out in this place by both major parties and by those who seek to govern both Australia and the states of our Commonwealth.

In that respect we support some of the moves by this government on some of these bills but we do not support the close of rolls bill. And we certainly think there should be a much stronger response to the outrageous, disgusting tactics used by the South Australian Labor Party.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (8.17 pm)—I rise to support the four electoral bills, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Close of Rolls and Other Measures) Bill (No. 2) 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll Voting and Other Measures) Bill 2010, the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2010 and the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010 before the House this evening that are being dealt with together. I am pleased that it looks like the opposition will be supporting three of those bills with some qualifications. I look forward to the amendments coming from the opposition in relation to the how-to-vote bill.

The member for Mayo correctly summarised my position. I do not condone what happened in South Australia; I condemn it. Indeed, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, which I chair, is undertaking a reference into that matter which was sent to it from the Senate. We will not be pulling our punches in relation to that. It is in the interests of all parties that we have some integrity in the system and that those sorts of events are not allowed to occur again. If the opposition has amendments that they believe can strengthen this bill, I suggest to them that they place those amendments before the Special Minister of State so that they can be looked at.

In relation to the pre-poll voting and other measures bill and the modernisation and other measures bill I understand from what members opposite say that they are broadly supportive. Those bills arise from unanimous recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. We looked at a lot of those issues as a committee and there were a number of unanimous recommendations. I want to point out a couple in particular to the House which are to do with pre-poll voting and other measures. In the second reading speech it was pointed out that the amendments followed our inquiry and will:

- modernise enrolment processes to enable electors to update their enrolment details electronically;
- allow the Australian Electoral Commission (the AEC) to manage its workload more efficiently by enabling enrolment transactions to be processed outside the division for which the person is enrolling;
- enable prepoll votes cast in an elector’s ‘home’ division to be cast and counted as ordinary votes; and
- provide a legislative framework for people who are blind or who have low vision to cast an independent and secret vote.

They are amendments to the act that all sides can support, and I anticipate that support to be forthcoming from the opposition. In relation to the bill on modernisation and other measures, that bill:

- repeals redundant provisions;
- gives the Electoral Commissioner flexibility rather than prescription; and
places more technological tools at the Australian Electoral Commission’s (AEC) disposal so that the AEC can continue to deliver the best enrolment and election practices.

Again, that comes off some unanimous recommendations. One in particular that I am proud of, which the commission supports and which the committee took up unanimously, is allowing provisional enrolment at the age of 16 rather than 17, thus dropping the age that people can provisionally enrol by 12 months. That will allow people to automatically attain full enrolment on their 18th birthday. Provisional enrolment is voluntary but the beauty of bringing it back to 16—I think this is the sort of enrolment that can take place in the UK—means that electoral officials can actually capture more students while they are at school. They do not get as many at age 17 because they are doing their HSC year at that age.

The commission’s response to provisional enrolment at 16 was very positive and the committee was unanimous. That measure does not favour one party or the other, but people at 16 are, I think, more interested in politics or maybe they are not as cynical as some of those who are 17. Once they are on the roll, if an election comes around and they are 18 you have captured them. The statistics show that enrolment is not as high from the age of 18 all the way through to 25. It is not until you reach the 25-year-old age group that you are getting 95 per cent enrolment. I think this provision is an improvement. I think that this bill is also not contentious.

I turn to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (How-to-Vote Cards and Other Measures) Bill 2010. It regulates the authorisation of how-to-vote cards to make it clear who will benefit from the preference flow suggested on the how-to-vote card. Secondly, the bill prohibits a person from causing to be printed, published or distributed, including by radio, television, internet or telephone, anything that may mislead or deceive an elector in relation to how to cast a vote. I do not want to repeat the second reading speech, but the conclusion of the second reading speech says:

The government is committed to reducing the potential for voters to be misled and to give voters the means to make informed decisions about voting.

I again repeat my challenge to the members of the opposition: if there are deficiencies in this bill, we should be told about them—we should be told how it can be improved—and not on the day the bill is going to be discussed in the Senate. Come up with some meaningful amendments that the Special Minister of State can have a look at to ensure that what happened in South Australia does not happen federally. I do not intend, as my learned colleague was once captured saying, to be seen to defend the indefensible. What happened was indefensible. It was a cute trick. It might have got people over the line, but it was immoral. It has no place on a continuing basis in our system.

That is why I favour regulation. I do not allow the free market to determine what the parameters should be in these sorts of circumstances. I believe in regulations, tight regulations, so that the system is fair to everyone. Deception should not be part of our electoral system, the system that determines whether a government or opposition wins an election and whether someone wins a seat. I am actually quite proud of our electoral system, and I am quite proud of our Australian Electoral Commission, because I think they are the finest in the world. I support compulsory voting and I support full preferential voting, because 95 per cent of people attend on election day and 95 per cent cast formal votes. That gives credibility to the result at the end of the process.
You only have to have a look at what happened in the United Kingdom recently to see the stalemate they achieved. You had 35 per cent of the vote for the Conservatives, 29 per cent for the Labour Party and 22 per cent for the third force, the social democrats. They now have a coalition government. But when you have a situation like ours, you do not get 60 per cent attendance, you get 95 per cent attendance. You do not want activities such as those which occurred in South Australia to discredit a system—or activities like those in Greenway in 2004. Unknown persons ran a smear campaign that cost the Labor Party the seat of Greenway. In 2007 they were pinged in Lindsay. They were caught and, to his credit, John Howard disowned them at the drop of a hat. He did not defend what they did. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters looked at that situation and we ended up with a unanimous report. We came up with recommendations for the parliament so that those sorts of things do not happen again.

The one bill that I do want to spend a bit of time on—and I know my time will run out shortly—is the close of rolls and other measures bill. It restores the close-of-rolls period to seven days after the issue of the writ for an election and it repeals the requirement for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity. The coalition put forward the age-old chestnut that fraudulent activity is the reason for the measures they put in when in government, measures that disenfranchised many tens of thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands. Let us be clear: under the old system for provisional voting, if you rolled up and your name was not on the roll, you could get a provisional vote and then you signed the envelope. That envelope and signature were then checked against the Australian Electoral Commission’s repository—from when you first enrolled or when you transferred your enrolment from one electorate to another. Signatures were compared in the event of doubt. That is the best proof of identity there is. Instead, the Liberal Party came up with this concoction that you had to produce a licence—and 27,000 people got disqualified. In all the time I have been on the committee—some 12 years out of the 20 that I have served in this place—we have had no evidence at all of wholesale fraudulent activity. Indeed paragraph 3.59 of the report said:

The committee has received no evidence that fraudulent activity was reduced as a result of the amendments to the close of rolls. On the contrary, there is no evidence available that indicates systemic fraudulent activity exists.

It is the same with provisional voting.

A lot of people missed out because of the withdrawal of the seven-day rule. There was a $30-odd million campaign and there was a reduction in the number of people who missed out compared to 2007, but, if ten miss out, if a hundred miss out or if a thousand miss out, that is ten, a hundred or a thousand too many. We have computerisation. Seven days into a 33-day cycle allows the Electoral Commission to produce a roll that can be looked at. We have a more mobile population—young people moving. If you look at the census figures you will see the level of movement. The party that says it is not in favour of red tape introduced red tape to knock people off. At the last election in 2007, you could have had the rolls close on the day the Prime Minister called it. The reason we got three days was that there were public holidays in two states, so there was actually a three-day grace period. That three-day grace period before the close of rolls allowed a lot of people to get on the rolls who otherwise would not have been on them. These were people legitimately tidying up their electoral enrolment. It is red-hot that a system in place since 1983, about which there was no evidence of systemic fraud, was
withdrawn, leading to hundreds of thousands of voters being disenfranchised.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 8.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Paterson Electorate: Telecommunications**

**Mr BALDWIN** (Paterson) (8.30 pm)—Improved telecommunications are an important issue for my electorate of Paterson. However, tonight I wish to raise two completely separate issues that have been brought to my attention recently involving installation of Optus mobile telephone towers at sites in my electorate of Paterson. On 28 April, I was contacted by Paul Le Motte on behalf of Jackie and Tony Richardson of 2 Mooghin Road, Seaham. In a letter Jackie Richardson said:

> Just two weeks ago one of my neighbours was informed by Optus workers that a large phone tower was to be erected on the immediate adjoining property to us just 17 metres from our property boundary and only 40 metres from our family home. We have not and neither have any of our other neighbours been notified of this intention. We know as a home owner in the shire that we need approval to erect any structure on our land and that our neighbours would be notified and asked to lodge objections or concerns with council.

On 5 June, at a public meeting at the Mooghin Road site, which was organised by Mrs Richardson and attended by a large group of concerned residents, it was clear that this tower would impose and impact on these poor people. It is absolutely ridiculous and defies common sense that a tower is proposed to be sited so close to a house when there are plenty of suitable acreage sites around the area that would not impact on the community adversely.

Optus has advised me that the Seaham site is still only in a test phase. Optus has not yet presented a DA to council. However, I understand the 2B Mooghin Road site is Optus’s preferred site. At the meeting on 5 June, I was approached by Elisa Fitzpatrick of Martins Creek Road, Paterson. This site issue is somewhat different from Seaham one as the Paterson tower has already been approved by Dungog Shire Council. In a letter dated 8 June 2010, Elisa Fitzpatrick said:

We moved to Martins Creek Road, Paterson one and a half years ago after a battle with Maitland Council over the now erected mobile phone tower at the Morpeth Bowling Club. Our home was close, and our children are young, and after standing before the Council voicing Morpeth community’s objection to the tower and being ignored, we decided to take the tree change to Paterson. Now we face another tower.

The Paterson site is only 100 meters from our home and therefore our children, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day will be subjected to radiation whose health effects are by no means completely understood. Properties are 5-160 acres in this area and so 100m is relatively immediate. It appears that although Council policy states that there are exceptional circumstances when other properties are required to be notified prior to the DA going through Council, it was decided that we were not worthy of that exception.

We received a radiation report from Optus, which states that the radiation will peak at 97.3 meters from the tower and we are approximately 100 meters from the tower. How is it we receive the highest quantity of radiation from this tower and yet have known NOTHING until a bucket truck arrived on our fenceline a few weeks ago?

If this tower goes ahead, we will move. It will break my family’s heart, as we love so dearly our home. We have established an orchard, the children have chickens and donkeys, a tree house and a large vegetable patch. This was our dream and now, if we sell, we will lose money on this property, no one will want to live so close to a tower out here in the country. We will lose money that is largely borrowed.
Construction of the tower has not yet begun. There must be alternatives out here with so many large properties and mountainous country.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that Optus has followed all the guidelines, and legislation does not require that it consult nearby neighbours. However, it is abundantly clear to all that telecommunications companies need to be held more accountable for community consultation. At the moment, their legal requirements to the community are inadequate and need to be addressed. Is it not ironic that a tower cannot be built within 200 metres of a school, preschool or elderly home, yet it can be built as close as 40 metres from a family home? Had more consultation taken place, I am sure a compromise could have been struck so that all those involved would have been satisfied with the tower location. There is plenty of open space in both Paterson and Seaham. I have advised Optus of a number of options and I am working towards an acceptable solution with them. I urge Optus to reconsider the approved Paterson site. I also urge meaningful consultation and a fair result for everyone. After all, Optus will be after their business, carrying their mobile phone signal.

Makin Electorate: Para Hills

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (8.34 pm)—This year the suburb of Para Hills in the Makin electorate and City of Salisbury celebrated its 50th anniversary. On 8 May 2010 a day of community events were held to celebrate this milestone. I attended the day’s events where I was able to touch base with existing and former local residents, many of whom had been pioneers in the early development of the suburb. I was able to catch up with many of the people I have built a personal friendship with over the years.

There is indeed much to celebrate about Para Hills. It is now very much an established community and at times it is even described as an aging community. However, 50 years ago it was all farmland and some considerable distance from any of the surrounding townships. As a child, I grew up in the neighbouring community of Pooraka and can well remember the growth and emergence of Para Hills. The early settlers of the new township of Para Hills can truly be referred to as pioneers. They pioneered a 430 acre residential development that was ahead of its time and, because of their efforts, continues to serve the community very well today and will continue to do so into the future.

My understanding is that Para Hills was the first complete township developed by a private developer in metropolitan Adelaide. The original Para Hills estate cost around £6 million and was the initiative of Reid Murray Developments Pty Ltd, led by its Managing Director, Max Liberman. It was an innovative residential development—it was a complete home package scheme. Land and house, with an automatic washing machine, a refrigerator and a 23 inch TV could be purchased at that time for around £4,500. Within the estate, a large nursery was established and each resident was given six plantings for their new home. Each home, which had three bedrooms, was on an allotment of approximately 700 square metres or larger. Another distinguishing feature of Para Hills is that few residential estates or suburbs can boast the range of community facilities that exist today in Para Hills.

Within a decade or so of the suburb being established, community facilities included a diversity of churches; a primary and secondary school, and the primary school’s numbers reached something like 1,100 within a few years of its establishment; a post office; a council-provided library; a senior citizens centre; a police station; a hotel; a swimming centre; a secure dog park; Salisbury council’s first purpose-built multiuse community cen-
tre; and a resident built and owned licensed community club, built largely from the fundraising efforts of the locals at the time. The multitude of sports facilities included Para Hills Soccer Club, home of the Knights; a junior soccer club; an Aussie Rules football club; a tennis club; a netball club; a dance group; a gymnastics club; and the Para Hills Bowling Club. More recently, the Para Hills Amateur Boxing Club, which was in existence from day one, was provided with new facilities. Today it boasts probably the best boxing club facilities in Adelaide. In addition, a country fire service, a scout group, a Lions club, a Country Women’s Association branch, a progress association and the Para Hills Brass Band were formed.

Each of these organisations has its own success stories to tell, but time does not permit me to elaborate on those tonight. Perhaps the most noticeable and visionary achievement of the local community has been the preservation of some 50 hectares of land, now known as ‘the paddocks’, for community recreation, open space and wetlands development. Salisbury council’s first internationally recognised water-harvesting and recycling scheme was established at the paddocks. Securing the 50 hectares of paddocks land for recreation and open space was itself an epic battle for the local community at the time. Agreement was ultimately reached with the Dunstan government of the day and ‘the paddocks’ public open space was secured.

There are so many people that deserve credit for all that has been achieved in Para Hills over the years. Time does not allow me to name them, and I would always risk omitting some if I tried to. A number of them went on to serve on Salisbury council, and I had the privilege of working alongside them. They were people like David Plumridge, Declan Moore, Eric Gardner, Patsy Nias, Ann Irving and Shiralee Reardon.

In celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Para Hills has much to be proud of. The hard work, the vision and the determination of the early settlers is being built on by equally motivated local residents today. Many of the original residents continue to live in Para Hills—a little older, but no less passionate about their community. Only last week at a public forum, Bob Giles—one of the first Para Hills settlers and one of the key drivers in those early years—as sharp and articulate as ever, stood up for his community. To all of the people who have, over the past 50 years, contributed to the Para Hills community, and to all those who continue to work for that community—and they know who they are—I say: thank you for your efforts and for making Para Hills the suburb it is, a suburb worth celebrating. (Time expired)

Farrer Electorate: Cancer Services

Ms LEY (Farrer) (8.40 pm)—Tomorrow, a busload of cancer patients, cancer carers and allied cancer workers from southern New South Wales and north-east Victoria will travel to Canberra to present a petition of about 17,000 signatures—17,000 signatures from people who were extremely disappointed that Albury-Wodonga was excluded from the centres provided with the funding under the rural and regional cancer centre program which Minister Roxon announced earlier this year.

These signatures are from people who are personally affected by this decision. They have mothers, fathers, children or friends who have been impacted by cancer. In fact, it is impossible in Albury-Wodonga not to know someone who is having, or has had, some form of treatment for cancer—or someone who has passed away from cancer. I know many, and, unfortunately, so do my children. I do not remember knowing anyone with cancer when I was their age. Times have changed, and now we do have a better
rate of success in diagnosing and treating this disease, but we must change our thinking to ensure that rural and regional areas are known for providing first-class, accessible health services.

This program seemed to present us with an opportunity to provide those first-class services in the way that local cancer professionals considered the most appropriate. We have the people willing to work with the government to provide the services, but at this stage we have no commitment from Mr Rudd, Minister Roxon or anyone in the Rudd government to support them in return. There is no support either from the New South Wales or Victorian state governments. In fact, they cannot seem to work out who should be looking after the health of those on the border. New South Wales did not provide funding in the budget because they said it was Victoria’s responsibility. The Victorian Premier, John Brumby, is now encouraging people to move to regional Victoria, but the state government did not support the funding for the infrastructure to care for those people—how ironic is that?

I am told that in the Albury-Wodonga region about 1,400 new cases of cancer are diagnosed each year. Many of those people have to travel hundreds of kilometres for surgery, diagnosis and follow-up treatment. We are lucky to have private radiography facilities and also a private, and a very tightly-stretched public, chemotherapy service. But this is certainly not enough.

I will do my best to draw you a picture of what a cancer sufferer in Albury-Wodonga goes through. Imagine, if you can, that you are the mother of two young children. You have not been able to work for a while because you have not felt well, but everyone has told you it is stress related. Imagine how you feel when, after presenting yourself to the emergency department and being admitted to hospital, they tell you they found a brain tumour and you have to immediately fly hundreds of kilometres to a hospital in Melbourne because that is the only place that has the technology and the personnel to accurately locate and diagnose your tumour.

Then, there you are in Melbourne, hundreds of kilometres away from your primary-school-aged children, your husband, your parents and your friends. You are in a large public hospital with overworked staff, and you are told you should get your affairs in order prior to going into surgery. You cannot have surgery close to home, because there is no facility. Your husband cannot leave the children and you have no-one to talk to, other than the patient in the bed next door, who tells you they have just had their second similar operation and the prognosis was poor.

Luckily, you come out of surgery and then, after very little time, the hospital deems you well enough to go home. They do this quickly because they need the bed. After you are deemed well enough to leave hospital, you have to drive the hundreds of kilometres back to your home. No-one from the hospital in that strange city will drive you home. You certainly cannot afford a taxi, and you cannot fly after the operation. Your parents are too old to drive to Melbourne and back, and you are too embarrassed to ask your friends to come all that way. You have to either get a train or drive home—hours away. You have no hair; it has not grown back after the operation. You do not feel up to driving, but you have to drive...
to those appointments because there is no or very little public transport.

That is just one person—hundreds of people from our region go through similar circumstances every year. We must do what we can to make their lives easier. They deserve it, and our region deserves to be able to provide these people with the best care and support it can. We have the professionals, we have the commitment, we have the community and we definitely have the need. We are vibrant and self-sufficient, and we really ask for very little from the government.

Minister Roxon gave away funding to an area which did not even meet the criteria of a rural or regional hospital when she approved funding for Gosford-Wyong. She bent the rules. She moved the goalposts. She treated people in real regional areas with real need for this funding with contempt when she made the decision to travel up and down the country announcing funding in marginal areas, even when they were not regional. In the manner which has, unfortunately, been typical of this government, they made the rules up as they went along. They promised regional Australia help and they did not come up with the goods.

Kingston Electorate: Water

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (8.45 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about the important investment this government has made in water infrastructure. I was very pleased last week to be with Senator Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water, to announce some significant funding for South Australia as part of the National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns program. South Australia shared in $19.2 million of federal government funding to implement a variety of projects to re-use waste water and perhaps to collect storm water. Statewide there are 29 subprojects that will help 18 South Australian councils diversify their future water supplies and improve their capacity to better manage current water resources.

We in South Australia know how precious water is. We are seeing some significant continuing water shortages where we are struggling to meet our critical water needs as well as irrigation and water for the environment. Being downstream of the Murray we know only too well what climate change in combination with over-allocation is doing to our water supplies. The community in Adelaide and South Australia has very much welcomed the significant investment that this government has made in water infrastructure so that Adelaide can reduce its reliance on the Murray-Darling system and make sure that we are conserving water as best as is possible.

I was very pleased that, as part of this announcement last week, the City of Onkaparinga in my local electorate received money for their subproject worth $52,000. This included a project for the McLaren Vale Information Centre that would reduce the use of potable water by using recycled water, which is very important. This visitor centre has many people come through its doors. The vineyard opposite is receiving recycled water from another government project. The other project is that at McLaren Flat Recreation Ground. This important community hub will now use stormwater and rainwater capture from roofs of the facility to put on the grounds. This will benefit the football club, the tennis club and the community centre. This set of infrastructure projects is not the first that my local electorate has received. After 12 years of neglect by the previous government when it came to conserving water, we have seen this government invest in water infrastructure.

It started when I was elected and was delivering on my election commitment to pro-
vide $3.5 million to the area of McLaren Vale and to the irrigators to get them off mains water and onto recycled water. That was a really important investment to conserve water. In addition, this government funded the Onkaparinga City Council to the tune of $34.45 million for waterproofing south stage 1 and has now followed up with another $14.97 million to undertake waterproofing south stage 2. This is an innovative project to capture and harvest stormwater and then put it into wetlands and re-use it for watering parks and gardens and other council facilities. This is looking at harvesting over 1,300 million litres of water, a significant amount that will go into the community. In addition, my electorate and the City of Onkaparinga have also received a $750,000 investment to help the council construct the Woodcroft Green Precinct designed for the library and the neighbourhood centre as a demonstration site to show community members how to use the most efficient lighting but also how they might re-use water, how they can use solar panels and a whole range of things. *(Time expired)*

**Boothby Electorate: Vandalism**

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (8.50 pm)—I rise this evening to put on the record a major issue of concern for many residents in my electorate. The community of Boothby has recently seen an escalation of vandalism and antisocial behaviour, damaging the premises of local businesses and causing substantial cost to the livelihoods of owners. Petty crime, the defacement of personal property and violence have become prevalent in pockets of my electorate, in particular in the area of Blackwood. Recently there was a brazen attack by vandals where a suburban train which was stationary while collecting passengers was graffitied within a minute. This was captured on CCTV camera.

Blackwood by day is a picturesque community in the Adelaide Hills. However, by night it is an unsafe, sometimes frightening place to be. Deliberately lit fires, graffiti, destruction of shopfronts and assaults are standard for a Friday or Saturday night. On Saturday 3 April this year, four fires were started in the space of two hours near Main Road, the business precinct of Blackwood. The blaze which enveloped the premises of Jacob’s Tyres was reported to have caused $250,000 damage and led to a significant loss of earnings for the shop owner, Grant Jacobs.

Despite the supposed increase in police presence on weekends, Sturt Police Superintendent Graham Goodwin has confirmed there has been a proliferation of crime in the area of Blackwood. In March alone 18 graffiti reports were received, a 100 per cent increase in the monthly average. In just two months businesses reported 14 incidents of windows being smashed. So it is fair to say that the community, business owners, the local council and I are very disappointed that little action has been taken on local crime prevention.

At a recent gathering of small businesses through the Blackwood Business Network, I heard from many small businesses of the problems of local crime and petty crime and what they intended to do about it. Frustrated with the lack of government assistance, local business owners have taken this issue upon themselves and employed a security guard to patrol the streets on Friday and Saturday nights in an effort to discourage vandals. However, this is not nearly enough. Private citizens should not be expected to manage the safety of their local neighbourhoods. That is why I believe the government needs to act to increase safety on the streets of our local communities. Small business owners are lobbying for a 24-hour surveillance camera to combat the vandalism and violence.
that is plaguing the streets of Blackwood after dark. Closed circuit television systems have a twofold purpose—they not only assist the law enforcement agencies in identifying and apprehending criminals but also act as deterrents for those who are considering partaking in such unlawful behaviour.

Under the Howard government, the Community Crime Prevention Program was introduced in an effort to provide funding for such community based, security related infrastructure projects. This program was fundamental in promoting community safety and ensuring the bad guys were caught. However, it is disappointing to see that these local issues are simply not being addressed and are instead being neglected under the current government, with the Rudd Labor government not continuing with this program. Although petty crime, vandalism and graffiti are ostensibly local and state government issues, they are still important and should still be a priority at a federal level. The coalition recognises this and considers local crime prevention and community safety a legitimate concern.

It is my very strong view that more needs to be done to maintain the partnership between the local community and the federal government. As a matter of community safety, it is important that all levels of government contribute to the public discourse on law and order. Local communities such as Blackwood need to be heard. They need to receive more support and more funding to better combat the criminal activities plaguing their neighbourhoods. I stand with the residents of Blackwood on this issue and urge the federal government to take greater responsibility for local crime prevention.

**Lindsay Electorate: Education Funding**

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (8.54 pm)—Over the last 2½ years schools right around this country have been undergoing a revolution, but it appears as though the counter-revolution has begun. The Liberal-National Party have announced that they will take an axe to many of the very successful programs and the investments in education and training that this government has commenced. This is a grave threat and a grave risk to the educational opportunities of students right around this country, but in particular it is a threat in electorates like mine and other electorates in Western Sydney.

I will mention a few of the programs that are to be cut or slashed under the coalition if they were to be elected to office. They will be scrapping the funding for the computers in schools program, which is a very successful program. It is so successful a program that even the shadow Minister for Finance is claiming credit for having delivered computers into schools in his community on his own website under the heading of ‘What we have achieved for our community.’ He achieved nothing. He was part of a government that did not deliver any of that money. He was then part of an opposition that opposed that expenditure. He is now not only a member of an opposition that wants to rip that funding away but also the chief architect, the one who has the plan, of ripping that funding away. Yet he has the temerity to tell people on his website that that is what he is delivering for his community.

We have the scrapping of the computers in schools program. We have the discontinuation of round 3 of Building the Education Revolution. We have the scrapping of funding for trades training centres. We also have this proposal to rip away the funding that has been allocated to improve teacher quality in our schools. The impact of these cuts would be devastating and it would be felt in those communities that are at the front line of trying to use education as a tool for overcoming socio-economic disadvantage. My electorate
and others in Western Sydney would be hardest hit.

Recently I visited Cranebrook High School with the Deputy Prime Minister to hand over the 300,000th computer under the Digital Education Revolution program. We witnessed a music class and an agricultural class that were using these technologies to teach students in a way that previous generations never had the opportunity to experience. Make no mistake about it, if these programs are cut, there will be many schools in our country that will continue to have the resources to teach students with those new technologies, but there will be many schools in communities like mine that will miss out.

Under this program, Cranebrook High School has already received 204 computers. If the coalition were to be elected, they stand to lose the remaining 64 computers they would expect to receive under this program. But there are many more schools in my community that would suffer as a result of these cuts. In my community alone another 1,013 computers would be stripped away. But let’s look at some of the neighbouring electorates—for example, 990 computers in Macarthur, 795 computers in Macquarie and 733 computers in Greenway would be ripped away. I heard the member for Greenway in the Main Committee earlier today complaining about Building the Education Revolution. She has a lot of explaining to do because she is not only the member for Greenway but also the candidate for Macarquarie, so she should take ownership of the cuts that her opposition want to inflict in both of these electorates if they are elected to government. We are talking about 1,528 computers in total from those two electorates. She should hang her head in shame.

In addition to that, if we look at Building the Education Revolution we see that in my electorate $27.6 million worth of projects would be cut away. We see in Macarthur it would be $24.2 million. In Macquarie it would be $72.7 million. If we add to that the $21.9 million in Greenway, the member for Greenway has to account for why she wants to allow her party to rip away $94.6 million worth of school building projects in the electorates that she either represents or wants to represent. We will not stand for it. They want to rip away money from trade training centres and rip money away from teacher training. The counterrevolution is under way. They will not rest until they take away every opportunity that this government has presented students in regions like mine as far as educational opportunities are concerned. (Time expired)

House adjourned at 9.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act relating to the resolution of civil disputes, and for related purposes.

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Service and Execution of Process Act 1992, and for related purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Radiocommunications Act 1992, and for related purposes.

Mr Garrett to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the International Monetary Agreements Act 1947, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Tradex Scheme Act 1999, and for other purposes.

Mr Bruce Scott to move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the:
(a) difficulty that rural communities of Blackbutt and Benarkin encounter regarding insurance premiums, immigration arrangements and mail delivery inefficiencies due to having the same postcode as Ipswich; and

(b) request by the far Western Queensland community of Bedourie, which has the same postcode as a town 200 kilometres away, to be assigned its own postcode to improve mail delivery inefficiencies; and

(2) calls on the Government to amend the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989 to allow the communities of Blackbutt, Benarkin, Bedourie and others with similar difficulties to receive their own unique postcode.

Ms Parke to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that 20 June 2010 is World Refugee Day and that this year’s theme is ‘Home’ in recognition of the plight of more than 40 million uprooted people around the world, of whom 10 million are refugees of special concern to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);

(2) recognises that:

(a) no one willingly chooses to be a refugee—refugees are ordinary people fleeing from extraordinary circumstances, and they are human beings with hopes and aspirations for the future, deserving of the hard-won rights and protections that have been put in place since the end of World War II; and

(b) people fleeing persecution will seek a safe haven no matter how perilous the journey or unwelcome the reception; and

(3) recognises and welcomes the generous and compassionate contributions made by many Australians, and by Australian-based Non-Government Organisations and charities to the welfare of refugees and asylum seekers, and in particular commends the awareness-raising Refugees Realities project undertaken by Oxfam Australia and supported by many other organisations including AusAID, UNHCR and the Australian Council for International Development from 7 to 21 June 2010 in Canberra.

Ms George to move:

That this House:

(1) congratulates the Government on delivering major initiatives to help working women, including the introduction of Paid Parental Leave, the successful implementation of the Fair Work Act 2009 and increasing the access to and affordability of child care; and

(2) condemns the:

(a) Coalition for its lack of real support in these areas; and

(b) Opposition for its failure to support these initiatives that benefit working women and their families.

Mr Hayes to move:

That this House:

(1) recognises and acknowledges the significant contribution that officers across all Australian policing jurisdictions make to our local communities as we approach National Police Remembrance Day on 29 September 2010;

(2) remembers and unites to commemorate the ultimate sacrifices made by all police officers who have been killed in the course of their duties;

(3) honours the courage, commitment and memory of the many fine men and women who lost their lives during the execution of their official duty made in serving our community;

(4) pays tribute to the families and friends of those fallen police officers for the support they unreservedly provided during the career of their respective loved ones;

(5) encourages all Australians, as a sign of respect to those who have fallen, to attend a ceremony, or wear or display the traditional blue and white chequerboard ribbon, officially recognised as the symbol of Remembrance Day; and

(6) supports and thanks all serving police of Australia for their invaluable dedication and
commitment to make a difference, defend our way of life and safeguard the peace.

**Mr Hayes** to move:

That this House:

(1) affirms its recognition that a combination of special education, speech therapy, occupational therapy and behavioural interventions has proved to be successful in helping people with an autism disorder;

(2) recognises that early diagnosis and intervention are also essential to ensure families and carers have access to appropriate services and professional support;

(3) supports the Government’s policy to establish specialised child care and early intervention services for children with autism;

(4) acknowledges that with early intervention and appropriate support, children with autism have a much greater chance of fulfilling their potential and participating more fully in the community; and

(5) congratulates the Government on the decision to establish a groundbreaking Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre in Liverpool.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom) took the chair at 4.02 pm.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Dickson Electorate: Postbox

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (4.02 pm)—I rise today to speak on an issue that is important for the residents of Mount Samson, Samsonvale and surrounding areas in my electorate—that is, the lack of a local postbox. At a recent mobile office in the area, local residents presented me with a petition outlining the need for Australia Post to provide a red postbox in Mount Samson. The petition contained almost 300 signatures. Given the local community, including the nearby areas of Cedar Creek and Closeburn, comprises less than 1,500 people, 300 signatures demonstrate an overwhelming level of community demand for this service. Currently residents have to drive to Dayboro, Samford Village or Warner to access the nearest red postbox. That is a return journey of between 24 and 36 kilometres simply to post a letter. This is not just an inconvenience and a waste of time for local residents; the situation poses real problems for those with limited means of transport, particularly the elderly and the frail. For a community so close to the Brisbane CBD, this level of service in the 21st century is simply unacceptable, and it is a double blow given that this very same region is excluded from coverage under Labor’s much vaunted NBN program.

On the issue of broadband, I note with extreme disappointment that local residents would have had access to broadband for about six months by now under the previous, coalition government’s OPEL plan. The NBN Labor government plan appears to be as far away now as it ever was, and in any case I understand that Dickson residents from around Sanford, Dayboro and the regions in between will simply not be covered under Mr Rudd’s plan.

I will be fighting hard to assist local residents in their fight for a postbox to service Mount Samson, Samsonvale, Cedar Creek, Closeburn, Cashmere and Armstrong Creek. I have written today to the managing director and chief executive officer of Australia Post and invited Australia Post to begin consultation with the local community. Although it will ultimately be a matter for Australia Post, I agree with the suggestion by locals that the postbox should be located close to the primary school, town hall, childcare centre and shops on Winn Road in Mount Samson. That location is relatively central for local residents, and it is also convenient given its proximity to the services used most often by local residents.

I will be presenting the petition of local residents to the House in due course. I look forward to a favourable response from Australia Post. I seek the support of members of this House in achieving that objective, and I very much look forward to continuing to fight on behalf of the residents in my community on this particular issue, specifically those residents who live around Mount Samson, who are in great need of this service.

Petition: Feeding Tube Dependency

Mr KERR (Denison) (4.05 pm)—I rise today to present a petition, the principal petitioner being Karelle Logan, a constituent of mine. The petition has 3,155 signatories and relates to a circumstance that I think all members of this House would personally find quite moving: young infants and children who, for medical reasons and conditions, must be fed through a tube. This is a circumstance that Karelle Logan herself faced as a mother. It is obviously a
distressing one. The question she raises in this petition is the availability of what is known as the Graz model of tube weaning, which is a means being sought by the petitioners to encourage the withdrawal of tube feeding and the substitution of oral intake of nutrition and hydration.

These are obviously complex issues, but as the petitioners—who are extremely concerned about this distressing circumstance that most of us fortunately never need to face—say: if a child is presented with all the food and drink they require through a tube and there is no effective means of removing the tube, it becomes extremely difficult. This is an early intervention strategy which the petitioners recommend this House investigate—the numbers of children who are in this circumstance and the effectiveness of the Graz strategy—and initiate support in the health system to research and implement intensive weaning programs based on that model.

I hope that all members of this House understand that, whilst these are issues that, fortunately, most of us just do not have to confront, it is immensely traumatic for the parents who are confronted by them. These issues are immensely time consuming to the parents who have the care of children in these circumstances. This is a heartfelt plea on behalf of 3,155 petitioners—in particular, my constituent Karelle Logan, who is the principal petitioner—for the attention of this House to this distressing circumstance, for it to look at and support an innovative early-intervention strategy. I thank the House and I present the petition on behalf of the principal petitioner and the 3,155 signatories.

The petition read as follows—

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

This petition of certain concerned citizens of Australia Draws to the attention of the House:

The inadequate knowledge, research and health services, relating to prevention and treatment of feeding tube dependency, in infancy and early childhood in Australia’s Health System Feeding Tube Dependency is an undesired side effect of tube feeding. This dependency leaves an infant, child and their family trapped on a round about of tube feeding with no desire to eat and drink orally. The current therapy approaches are clearly not working. The Graz Model of tube weaning from Austria is becoming internationally recognized as the only way to rapidly wean children from their tube dependency. This treatment needs to be available in Australia.

We therefore ask the House to investigate:

- The numbers of tube fed infants and children in Australia, and their level of tube dependency.
- The financial cost of long-term tube feeding on a family and the Australian Health System.
- The emotional and psychological effect on families with a tube fed child.
- The reason tube feeding is being more frequently used in our Health System, rather than intensive support for oral feeding.
- Why there is no comprehensive exit strategy for individuals to remove the tube once the purpose has been served.
- Why there is currently no recognition by relevant therapists and experts that tube dependency is a major problem for children and their families in Australia.
- Initiating support in our Health System to start researching and implementing intensive weaning programs, based on the Graz Model of Tube Weaning from Austria.

from 3,155 citizens

Petition received.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Grey Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (4.08 pm)—I rise to raise an individual issue with the Deputy Prime Minister’s BER, or school halls project. Snowtown Area School is only an hour and a half north of Adelaide—in a seat like Grey, certainly not to be classed as remote by any measure. The Snowtown school has a student enrolment of about 90 and, accordingly, was allocated $850,000 for a classroom refurbishment program. One would hope that, at almost $9½ thousand per student, they end up with some pretty flash classrooms. However, I have received correspondence from the chairman of the school council, John Cummins, expressing frustration that the school is being forced to forgo $94,000 of the program to accommodate the late inclusion of tanks for firefighting purposes.

The school initially applied for funding under round 1 and was eventually successful under round 3. One would think that, after that amount of negotiation, all compliance issues would have been worked out, rather than finding that the school is being faced with a $94,000 hiccup. The tanks—two 37,000-litre tanks—are available from local tank suppliers for $8,900, less than 10 per cent of the value quoted. These tanks are not to be plumbed in, because they are to be drawn on only in a fire emergency. They will not collect rainwater; they must remain full at all times. Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, have you ever heard of anything more stupid than rainwater tanks that do not actually collect rainwater? The school already in fact has a number of rainwater tanks which can be drawn on and a swimming pool which holds double the capacity of the tanks.

Leaving aside the South Australian regulations insisting on these tanks when other suppliers are available, this is clearly an issue of state cost-shifting. Fire compliance is nothing to do with the BER, and Minister Gillard should get on top of her school rorts program. After all, how will having superfluous fire tanks at 10 times the market price possibly contribute to better educational outcomes for the children of Snowtown? The Deputy Prime Minister is keen to repeatedly advise us on this side of the House to come to her rather than to the press with individual problems so that she can sort them out. I wrote to Minister Gillard on 27 May and neither the school nor I have had any contact on the matter.

Snowtown is not the only school to have issues with fire tanks. The letter from John Cummins highlights the fact that a school on Eyre Peninsula managed to get their tanks installed at only—and I emphasise the ‘only’—three times the market value of $30,000, and a little closer to Adelaide Macclesfield Primary got theirs for $26,790, and they were the same size tanks. It was still probably far too much, in my opinion, but certainly only a fraction of the $94,000 being extorted out of the system by the South Australian Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure.

Greenway Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program

Mrs MARKUS (Greenway) (4.11 pm)—I rise today to update the House on a matter I raised in the Main Committee on 27 May this year and again during question time on 2 June this year. The Mount Victoria Public School is a great school. Together with the Leader of the Opposition, I visited Mount Victoria Public School on Friday, 4 June, to see firsthand the damage, delay and disappointment of the Rudd Labor government’s Building the Education Revolution rip-off.
The House is already aware of the scandal at Mount Victoria over the cost of a classroom to replace an already removed demountable. Baulking at the already overstretched cost of the brick classroom originally promised, the Rudd Labor government changed its mind and decided instead to construct a demountable Colorbond classroom at the school at a cost of $850,000. It took a visit from Tony Abbott and me to the Mount Victoria Public School to secure a brick classroom for the school. In fact, just hours before our visit, the brick classroom was approved at the still outrageous cost of $850,000. The school community, while it welcomes that it will be brick, is outraged that the proposed building will cost $850,000, especially when a ‘truly unique custom built and designed’ three-bedroom brick home across the street, with land included, is valued at half the price and is up for sale at $485,000.

When we were meeting with the local Parents and Citizens Association on that very brisk morning in Mount Victoria, it became clear that the school needed much more than just one new classroom—worth such an astonishing amount of money. The school desperately needs a covered outdoor learning area, or COLA, so the children can play outside and get some fresh air. The school does not have a covered outdoor area where the children can play. In winter it snows in Mount Victoria and the children are required to stay and play indoors during this time. Some of the classrooms at the school still have unflued heaters—another health issue which has caused a great deal of stress and another issue which has failed to be dealt with by the New South Wales state Labor government.

The coalition believes that the school community should have a say on how funds are spent on local infrastructure. I have no doubt that the Mount Victoria Public School community would be much better able to more efficiently spend their allocated BER funds than the central planning of bureaucrats in Sydney or Canberra. It beggars belief when you go to this school that a small classroom on a tiny block of land would cost so much money, and yet the school continues to miss out on what it desperately wants and needs.

The Rudd Labor government have ignored the concerns of the community in Mount Victoria and countless other communities across Australia. They have shown through their lack of action that the only way to get value for money for Australia’s schools—(Time expired)

Ukrainian Youth Association of Australia

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction) (4.14 pm)—I speak to recognise the 60th anniversary of the Ukrainian Youth Association of Australia and to praise the work that they have done. To read anything of the brutal history of the 20th century leads to an understanding of the gallantry and heroism of the Ukrainian people, who have suffered as much as any of the earth’s tribes in the last 100 years.

The seven million Ukrainian war dead, compared to 600,000 people from France, 350,000 British and 2½ million Japanese, is devastating. To think of the human tragedies that make up that sum, and the grief that followed each death, it is almost too large to grasp that scale of loss. We do not know what our country and the western world owe to Ukrainian people whose suffering, bravery and brilliance defended our civilisation in the worst of wars. They suffered the loss of identity under communism and the forced forgetting of language and culture—and then they were hit by Chernobyl, the industrial scar which cast a cloud over the world. Ukrainian people have a history that must be commemorated, must not be forgotten and must be passed to each new generation of descendents, no matter where they live.
But with this century of suffering comes much beauty: the superb seaside towns of Odessa and Yalta; the granaries and orchards of the hinterland that once fed half of the Soviet Union; the glorious Parisian architecture of Kiev, rebuilt sandstone by sandstone from old photographs out of rubble until it was as it had been before the war; the circuses, operas and choirs as evidence of how a culture can somehow survive all war and pestilence. Many Ukrainians left following World War II, not from choice but from a DNA-hardwired urge to provide a better life for their children and grandchildren. Wherever they landed, they prospered, and Melbourne is no exception. Like many other groups fleeing an uncertain future in a Europe torn by war and politics and the capricious forces of history, they found fertile soil here. Ukrainians have worked as labourers, in factories, in hospitals and in the Snowy Mountains scheme, providing the muscle, grit and compassion that grew this country in the 1950s and 60s. Ukrainian Australians found a place where their strength could be added to ours and they could freely pursue their version of the good life, culture and religion.

But this did not mean they forgot their past. Becoming an Australian was not a subtraction or diminution of identity; it was an addition which has enriched our nation. To see the work of the Ukrainian Youth Association, its role in celebrating a culture and a history, is to be reminded of the importance of cherishing the threads that link and bind the generations. It is a truism that if we do not know where we have come from then we cannot know where we are going. For those who have worked to keep Ukrainian culture and memory alive, it is a gift to future generations. Australians of Ukrainian descent are an adornment to Australia. They are an unmixed blessing to our nation. They and their history constitute for all of us a matchless example and an unrepayable debt. I salute Ukrainian Australians.

Child Care

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (4.17 pm)—I rise to highlight my concerns on behalf of the Yarram district community in relation to the provision of childcare services and this government’s broken promise to build 260 childcare centres across Australia. At the time of the government’s announcement that it would now build only 38 childcare centres, there was a justification put forward by the government and the ridiculous proposition by the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth, who claimed there are enough childcare places around Australia when in fact we have many smaller towns—many in my own electorate of Gippsland—still struggling to establish any service whatsoever. Families in regional areas such as Gippsland certainly deserve better than broken promises when it comes to key community issues such as childcare services.

The Yarram district community has worked for several years to try and achieve childcare facilities on behalf of working parents in the region. In the lead-up to the 2007 election, my predecessor, Peter McGauran, committed $1 million from a re-elected coalition government to provide childcare services in the Yarram region. That of course would have just been passed as an election commitment. The change of government would have seen the end of that commitment, I suppose, except that the Labor candidate at the time also endorsed that position. The Labor candidate, Ms Rowe, was quoted in the Yarram Standard of 31 October 2007 as saying that she had also pledged that a childcare centre would be incorporated into a broader community centre rather than a stand-alone complex. That promise has gone by the wayside in the subsequent three years and with the government’s decision in relation to building the 260 childcare centres.
Last Friday I met with the Mayor of the Wellington Shire Council, Scott Rossetti; the state member of parliament, Peter Ryan; and Alison Payne, who has been at the forefront of the community’s efforts to secure childcare services in Yarram. From that meeting it was resolved to continue to pursue options and to seek to still develop a service in Yarram as soon as possible. But the question for the community is where to go next, given the government’s broken promise and the government’s decision to change the rules halfway through the process. I do note that in the minister’s, Kate Ellis’s, announcement of 22 April she says that the government:

… acknowledge that there are some circumstances where families face challenges finding child care that meets their particular requirements and we will continue to keep a watching brief on the child care market and child care vacancies and … take action if required.

I urge the minister to extend her watching brief to include the community of Yarram and to take action, which is most certainly required. It makes it very difficult for a small regional centre to attract professionals—particularly those in the health industry—when there are no support services for mothers, in particular, returning to the workforce. I urge the minister to come true with her own undertakings in that press release and in a subsequent press release on 29 April, where she said:

All Australian families deserve high quality, affordable and accessible child care services no matter where they live and this funding will help achieve that.

It does beg the question to the minister: what about Yarram? When will you start looking seriously at the needs of small, regional towns in relation to—(Time expired)

Lindsay Electorate: Penrith Jobs Expo

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (4.20 pm)—I rise to take note of the recent Jobs Expo held in Penrith and to acknowledge the phenomenal success that this expo had in linking up job seekers with employment opportunities. It has been a source of great pride to me to be a part of a government that acted quickly and decisively during the global financial crisis to save the jobs of over 200,000 Australians. This is a part of the government’s record of which I am proud and something that I think also highlights the failures of the opposition. They opposed the stimulus package. They only have a plan to bring back Work Choices when it comes to the labour market. Their plan is, ‘Don’t support jobs’ and ‘Make the jobs that people do have even less secure than they would otherwise be.’

After having acted decisively at the national level during the global financial crisis, I campaigned very hard at the local level with local community and business groups as part of the Keep Penrith Working campaign. That campaign was about ensuring that local businesses and local employees were able to take advantage of the stimulus package. That campaign was then followed last year by the designation of the Western Sydney area as a priority employment area, which included the appointment of a local employment coordinator. One of their roles has been to host the Jobs Expo. The Penrith Jobs Expo was the 20th such event around the country. Jobs Expos have been aptly described as job supermarkets, where businesses hold stalls and advertise employment to the thousands of job seekers who attend. I was honoured to officially open the expo with the Parliamentary Secretary for Employment, Jason Clare, and the Jobs Expo ambassador, television tradie, Scott Cam.

The Penrith Jobs Expo was one of the most successful in the country, with more than 9½ thousand job seekers streaming through the Panthers’ pavilion—800 of whom walked away
with a job on that day. While there are still some fragile sectors of the economy, we are unique among the major economies of the world in having the ability to hold Jobs Expos where businesses are looking for staff and are employing staff. Local businesses like Mister Ply&Wood, which I visited recently where manager Chris Carter told me that there are 11 jobs on offer across his group. In the budget we announced an extension, until November this year, of the Apprentice Kickstart program. The program triples the financial incentive for employers. Under the existing program, which has just recently come to an end, 240 apprentices were employed in my electorate. Companies such as DB Carpentry and Hix Electrical and Data Services took advantage of this opportunity. Investing in skills is the key to growing the productive capacity of the economy and that is why this government will continue to invest in skills and to support jobs in local communities like mine. (Time expired)

Deakin Electorate: Glen Park Pavilion and Dorset Golf Course

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (4.23 pm)—Today I would like to tell the House about two wonderful new projects that have just opened in my electorate of Deakin. The first is the Glen Park Sports Pavilion. Glen Park is located in Bayswater North, a suburb that is often overlooked when it comes to infrastructure; a suburb that does not really have a centre to it. So a facility like a new football club pavilion—at a ground which until only very recently had nothing—is a great leap forward for our local community. This is a $500,000 federally funded project and it means that the community centre, which used to have to share some of its rooms with a football club, now does not. Even better, it means the community centre does not have to share the football club’s mud. That was a big problem, because the rooms that were used as change rooms on a weekend were also used as rooms for disabled artists and others who used the community centre during the week. Now, the two have been separated. They are still close by and are good neighbours, but they can now do things with their own space that they could not do before.

The new pavilion has a brand-new canteen and includes disabled amenities, storage rooms, a kiosk and covered veranda areas to protect spectators. These spaces enable the clubs that are based there, East Ringwood Football Club and South Croydon Cricket Club, to provide a complete service to their members and spectators at club events. Again, that is a great thing for the local area. Even better, this was an election campaign promise from 2007—yet another promise delivered locally, in full, by the Rudd Labor government.

I also want to take the time to inform the House of the upgraded facilities at Dorset Golf Course in Croydon, with money under round 1 of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. Dorset Golf Course is used by over 60,000 people a year and the federal government, through the RLCIP, put in $295,000. This has allowed the clubrooms to be rebuilt and enlarged. That included putting cladding on the external sides of them. The roof has been removed and redone. The building interior has been completely gutted, redesigned and fully renovated, so it is now a usable meeting space as well as a base for people setting out to play a round of golf. There is a new kitchenette inside and also new toilets. The driving range has also been redone. This is a great project for Croydon. The golf course there has been around for many years. It is run by the council and recommended far and wide. Local golfers will continue to use it but now in far greater comfort. It was built many years ago on an old tip site and it served many people in that time. It is certainly now a much better facility. It was my great pleasure to be at the opening of the Dorset Golf Course on 9 June.
Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (4.25 pm)—I rise to raise concerns on behalf of the community of East Gippsland and the public, particularly those in the tourism industry, travelling through the region of East Gippsland about the status of the Princes Highway east of Sale. There is a need for the federal government to urgently consider the current arrangements whereby the highway east of Sale is not recognised under the national road network and therefore is not eligible for federal funding in the same way as the highway further to the west. I do note for the record, despite the continued protestations by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government about the issue, that the broader community, including me, have been very supportive of the work that has been done in terms of duplication upgrades of the highway between Traralgon and Sale.

Under the federal government program $140 million has been allocated, along with $35 million from the state government. This matter has received bipartisan support over many years. But the highway east of Sale is one of great concern to me and to the people of East Gippsland. It is one of the most dangerous sections of road in Victoria. In fact, there have been 24 fatalities in the past six years on this section of road, stretching from Sale to the New South Wales border. A petition has been started, the principal petitioner being a Bairnsdale man, Tim Bull, under the auspice of ‘Fix our Highway.’ As we all know, if you fix country roads you will save lives in country areas. The Fix our Highway campaign is well under way with, I understand, 1,000 people having already signed the petition, calling on the federal government to recognise the highway as a road under the national road network.

Funding for more overtaking lanes to improve the safety of motorists is required for the highway east of Sale. The section, particularly east of Orbost, is in very poor condition. There is a complete lack of shoulders on many sections of the road, leading to large drop-offs on the seal on the side of the road and the likelihood and the all-too-frequent occurrence of major accidents, particularly with heavy vehicles using the road on a daily basis, not only the heavy transporters associated with the timber industry but also the larger recreational vehicles which are now in common use on our highways. One small mistake by a motorist should not end up as a fatality, but on too many sections of the Princes Highway east of Sale we are faced with that situation. We must spend more money in improving the safety of the road environment.

One other key area is the provision of rest areas on the highway east of Sale not only for the heavy transport industry, using the route from Melbourne to Sydney via Canberra, but also for the recreational vehicles which, increasingly, use the highway. They do not require full camping sites but require somewhere they can stop for the night in their self-contained vehicles. In terms of the safety of the highway another key aspect is the complete lack of funding for improving the road surface.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (4.29 pm)—Tonight I would like to put on record my concerns about the Huon Valley Trade Training Centre in my electorate, which will be under threat should the Liberal-National coalition get elected. With federal Liberal plans to cut $230 million from round 2 of the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program, for which we announced the successful schools late last year, my local community at Huon Valley high school is particularly concerned. It will also impact on the other schools who have worked really hard to secure the Huon Valley Trade Training Centre. Dover District High School, Geeveston Dis-
HOBART: High School, Huonville High School and the Woodbridge School have pooled funding to construct a $6.4 million facility at Huonville. We now know that, should the Liberals get elected, this will not go ahead.

I am particularly concerned about comments by the Liberal candidate in my electorate which were quoted in the *Huon Valley News*. She said:

The Trades Training Centres in schools model, attaching a relatively small technical section at the back of a secondary school, is not the right way to deliver high-quality technical education.

That is from the Liberal candidate in my electorate. We are talking about a $6.4 million trade training centre. In stark contrast, in a letter to the editor of the *Sunday Tasmanian* a member of the community said:

The Huon Valley TTC will provide opportunities for Years 9-10 students in a range of industries. The biggest bonus is that the training will be locally based, with support from local employers. The retention hurdle of distance and city-based training will be removed.

Training opportunities in many of these industries do exist outside the valley, but not for aquaculture. While other states have thriving school-based aquaculture programs, Tasmania has none. Liberal Senator Richard Colbeck spoke at the recent AquaED conference about the value of aquaculture education yet his party’s policy is to scrap the only two potential school-based programs (another is planned for St Helens).

Industry bemoans the lack of school-based aquaculture training in Tasmania and … there are critical skills shortages in aquaculture yet very few young people enter the industry.

The Trade Training Centres are vital for addressing the retention needs of rural areas and skills shortages in crucial local industries, above all aquaculture. Any government which abandons this program now is not only short-sighted but selling short the future of our young people.

That was a local community member who is concerned that the $6.4 million Huon Valley Trade Training Centre would not be built should the Liberal-National coalition get elected. I know that my local community is very passionate about this trade training centre. They want it built. They have fought very hard for it and they have put in a very viable proposition for a range of trades—

*The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.*

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2010-2011**

Cognate bills:

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2010-2011**

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL (No. 1) 2010-2011**

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

*Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (4.33 pm)—When we last gathered, I had begun my address on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011 and cognate bills and I had been making the point, with regard to the new mining industry super tax being propounded by the Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, and the Treasurer, Mr Swan, that they were asking us to trust in them that this was a good tax. In looking at the question of trust, I drew people’s attention to*
the fact that Mr Swan was asking us to think the modelling showed that the mining industry paid only 17c in the dollar in tax. I asked whether you would believe that with regard to his track record back in 2000, when he was exposed by Wayne Sanderson, a journalist on The 7.30 Report, who brought to light that the Treasurer, the member for Lilley, who lost his seat in 1996, had tried very hard to keep it by giving to Lee Birmingham a brown paper envelope which contained some $1,400 in $50 notes. I said the envelope was taken by the said Lee Birmingham to the Democrats’ campaign manager, with whom, Mr Birmingham said, Mr Swan had spent some time only a day or two before. Mr Birmingham delivered the brown paper envelope to the Democrats and the Democrats in return gave their preferences to Mr Swan.

Subsequent to that, Mr Swan said that he had been wronged and that he had not paid for those preferences at all. He said the matter was referred to the Australian Federal Police, which it was. He said he had been cleared, but I think what the Australian Federal Police spokesman actually said was, ‘There is no further action in relation to Wayne Swan. I cannot say there is no case to answer, but no further action will be taken.’ That is very different from being cleared of wrongdoing. I reminded the House of this form, as we say, when we came to deal with the question of the case that is being put forward for the need for this great big new mining tax to be placed at the rate of 40c in the dollar on top of royalties, but royalties at a particular stage to be refunded, and only a permitted six per cent return to be earned before that supertax comes in.

I think it is important that we know the calibre and character of the people with whom we are dealing, because it is very likely that the Prime Minister and Mr Swan will try very hard to cut a deal, and they may even cut a deal on this mining tax. But you can never, ever believe that that will be the end of the matter. Time and again before the 2007 election, they swore that they would never tamper with the 30 per cent rebate on private health insurance. They said they would not means test it or cut it, and of course they did. They said they would build 222 new childcare establishments, and of course that got scrapped in the last budget.

Mr Rudd described himself as a ‘fiscal conservative’ and said that he would manage things just as John Howard had done and that you could trust him. But he has shown himself to be totally untrustworthy in the way that the government have embarked upon a tax-and-spend regime. We had policies introduced—like the pink batts affair, where we spent $2.45 billion to put pink batts and other insulation into the roofs of family homes. There were supposed to be proper training programs overseen by the Deputy Prime Minister and member of the gang of four, Ms Gillard, who was supposed to ensure that everybody putting insulation into roofs would be properly trained. Of course, that did not happen. Unfortunately, four deaths and 146 fires have occurred, and now we have reports that more investigations and inspections of roofs should be undertaken than the government is prepared to undertake; and, in any event, they are planning to spend something like a billion dollars to take stuff out again. Highly incompetent.

I have often asked: why is it that Mr Garrett is the man who had responsibility stripped from him and Ms Gillard did not? What is the difference between Mr Garrett and Ms Gillard? I suspect that the only answer is ‘hair’. If you look seriously at the problem that has been left as a result of the faulty installations and the failure to train, the Deputy Prime Minister is just as culpable, if not more so, than Mr Garrett. But of course Mr Garrett continues to sit on the
front bench, because he knows what is in that letter of 14 August of last year, when he wrote to the Prime Minister outlining his fears. The Prime Minister has refused to let that letter be made public and has locked it up as a cabinet paper for the next 30 years so that we cannot see its contents. But of course Mr Garrett knows what is in the letter, so he can continue to sit on the front bench. If we really think about it, it was Ms Gillard’s numbers that put Mr Rudd into the position of leader so he could become Prime Minister, so she too will not be penalised for her shortcomings with regard to the pink batts affair.

But then we come to a second area of hers—that is, the Building the Education Revolution. That title seems totally unconnected to the fact that they are building school halls, sheltered outdoor learning areas and canteens which are so inadequate that they cannot take a pie warmer, with inflated costs where big supporters of the Labor Party in the past are able to take large amounts of money that the state government is paying over on behalf of the federal government. The Deputy Prime Minister seems to be in a complete state of denial in that she refuses to acknowledge that there is a huge problem with this program. Sixteen billion dollars! There are so many things that could have been done which would have added to the productivity of this nation in the future, and yet we are absolutely weighed down by this hideous expenditure.

There is a net result for what this government has done, and it staggers me to think that it was done in just 2½ years. The coalition had left behind an economy which was debt free. We had paid off the $96 billion that Labor had left last time. Not only were we debt free; there was money in the bank, in the super fund, the education fund and other funds, and there was a surplus of $20 billion. How did they manage in just 2½ years to turn that around to borrowings? Bonds on issue are expected to be about $154 billion. The interest that they will pay in 2010-11 will be $4.6 billion and it will be $6.1 billion the year after that—money that could otherwise have been spent on benefits for the Australian people. We now have a deficit of $57 billion and we have not even started counting $43 billion for the National Broadband Network, which quite frankly nobody is going to want. The government is building a white elephant. What we have seen is a huge amount of debt imposed upon the Australian public. And it is their debt; they are the ones who are going to have to pay it back. There is no magic pudding.

The mining industry seems to be looked at by the government as either a magic pudding or a golden goose, in that they feel, with the huge tax they are going to place on that industry, that somehow they will be able to get themselves a $1 billion surplus in 2013. That is just staggering, if you think about it. If you examine it, they are trying to say that they are not going to change anything that is in the budget for 2010-11 for the next three years. What sort of nonsense is that? The forward estimates are based on what is in the budget as it is currently promulgated by the government, and yet every six months we have supplementary estimates to change the predictions because of a change in government policy or to correct mistakes that were in the original document. So to try and say that there will be no change between now and in three years time is pushing credibility just too far.

But for the Australian people the real choice is going to be this: they trusted Mr Rudd to govern the country as a fiscal conservative and in the interests of the Australian people. They trusted that he would not plunge us into debt, that he would not give us bad policies, that he would not squander money. We are a fair minded people, and fair minded people, Mr Rudd,
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gave you a go. They had great confidence in you. It was smiles all round until reality hit them, and then suddenly we see, and they see, that that trust was misplaced. We gave you a fair go, Mr Rudd, but now it is time for you to go. The Australian people cannot afford another three years which are a repeat of the 2½ that we have already had.

This is a wonderful country. It does not deserve what has been visited upon it. As we sat in question time this afternoon, we heard the usual spin—answering no questions, not even when they were well defined. It is just the same, almost non-sensical rhetoric that pours out. As I said, the Deputy Prime Minister refuses to see that there has been any waste in her program. So much so that, on 1 July, without even waiting to receive the report of the so-called audit—for want of a better word—she has put in place to look at the expenditure, she is going to roll out another $5.5 billion.

The plan is for this government to go on borrowing $700 million a week for the next three years. We will put in place a system whereby we will reduce our debt, reduce the deficit and start to put good, solid governance for the Australian people in place where the Australian people can again have confidence in government. Clearly every indicator shows that presently there is no confidence that Mr Rudd and his gang of four can deliver anything but debt and deficit. So I will say it again: we gave you a go, Mr Rudd. The Australian people gave you a fair go. Now it is time for you to go.

Mr TREVOR (Flynn) (4.46 pm)—I rise today to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011, Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2010-2011 and the Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011. In speaking on these bills today I want to reflect on the economy in general and also to speak more broadly on the 2010-11 budget and the effects it will have on my home electorate of Flynn in Central Queensland.

As our Treasurer Wayne Swan said on budget night, of Australia’s 18 years of continuous economic expansion, Australians can be proudest of the one just passed. I could not agree more with this comment. As the local federal member for Flynn I reflect on the challenges faced just 12 months ago, I am proud of what our great country has achieved. Twelve months ago the people in my electorate of Flynn, and indeed people everywhere in Australia, were gripped with that crippling fear at the hands of the global financial crisis. It was in fact a fear that made each working day sombre, the mood despondent. Certainly the air of unease was present on the many, many mining, industrial and construction sites in my home town of Gladstone and across the electorate of Flynn.

It was in fact a fear that each day the workers carried with them, constantly aware that at any moment their employer could give them a tap on the shoulder to tell them that they no longer had a job. Sadly, it was a fear that turned into a reality for hundreds and hundreds of good men and women in the electorate of Flynn. But today, as a result of sound economic management by the Rudd Labor government, as a country we stand having avoided a recession and we have emerged in the position of economic strength. Indeed, my home electorate of Flynn, which I have described as the industrial powerhouse of the nation, is now on the cusp of a major unprecedented economic boom. Multiple new projects worth billions and billions of dollars are ready to commence in the imminent future across the whole of the electorate of Flynn, creating thousands of new jobs and dwarfing any other boom that has ever been seen before.
Today as I move around the electorate of Flynn I see that the fear is gone. It has been replaced with a sense of renewed energy, keenness and some impatience as people eagerly await the imminent growth and prosperity which will come, which our government has set the platform for through its action in the budget.

The 2010-11 budget aims to build on the successes we have had as a nation during the global recession, creating a stronger and more secure economy for working families. With responsible and sound economic management, our government will halve peak debt and get the budget back into the black in three years—that is, three years early and well ahead of any major advanced economy in the world. Our government and the Treasurer of Australia, Wayne Swan, are to be commended. On behalf of the people of Flynn, I thank them.

Our government has put in place strict spending limits to ensure that we get back to surplus within three years and has also put in place key investments to prepare our country for the future. These include new investments in health, hospitals, skills training and infrastructure, the Renewable Energy Future Fund to tackle climate change, tax cuts and less red tape for small business, better superannuation, tax breaks on interest, a standard deduction to make tax time easier for working families and more money to protect our troops and our borders. All of this and still there will be a return to surplus three years ahead of schedule.

For small businesses the budget will provide a very positive tax break. Sole traders, partnerships and incorporated small businesses will all be able to instantly deduct the cost of assets valued at up to $5,000. There will also be a reduction in the company tax rate, down from 30 per cent to 28 per cent from 1 July 2012. This means that every single one of the 13,809 small businesses in Flynn will get a tax break under the Rudd Labor government.

An integral part of this year’s budget is the funding allocated for health care. The government is investing some $7.3 billion over five years, including 2009-10, to create the National Health and Hospitals Network. The 2010-11 budget delivers a further $2.2 billion package of investments to the National Health and Hospitals Network over four years. This massive injection of funding is working towards our government’s goal of better hospitals and better health for every Australian.

Another fundamental investment made in the budget is the funding to help raise the quality of services provided by budget based funded childcare centres. Undoonoo multifunction childcare centre in Woorabinda is one of many across Australia that will benefit from this. The Local Sporting Champions program is yet another great investment made in this budget. Having been a sportsman all my life I welcome this investment. The Australian government has doubled the number of Local Sporting Champions grants available in 2010-11. In regional areas such as Flynn, where children are almost always required to travel hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres to compete at state and national sporting events, this is immensely important. It will mean that more kids can receive much needed financial assistance to help cover the significant costs of chasing their dreams and competing at high levels in their chosen sports.

Another very important measure for the people of Flynn included in this budget is the $375 million allocated for a digital free-to-air satellite TV service that will enable viewers who are unable to receive TV in regional areas to see all of the digital channels enjoyed in the capital cities. It is a basic right that all Australians should share, including those in regional and rural Australia. I would also like to mention the Nation Building Program, in particular the Calliope
Crossroads project, in Flynn. It is apparent to anyone in the region who has been faced with the difficult task of navigating across this intersection that a solution needs to be found quickly before the community is rocked by another serious accident at this location.

The $15 million allocated for this work in 2010-11 is an important step towards solving the dangerous problem that the Calliope Crossroads has caused for many residents. I am truly pleased to see funding allocated for this project, which is just one of the many projects under the Nation Building Program that will see great improvements to the roads throughout Flynn, including the Curra to Sarina project and the upgrading of the southern approaches to Gin Gin and Kirkwood roads. This funding, along with funding received under the Roads to Recovery program and the Black Spot Program, will bring to nearly $100 million the total funding being spent on local roads across Flynn. This is something that the people have cried out for, but no longer are they ignored.

The budget has also given rise to discussion of the resource super profits tax. I fully support the resource super profits tax, subject to ongoing negotiation and consultation. The taxpayers and ratepayers of Flynn should no longer be forced to pay for roads and infrastructure for the mining companies, only to see their superprofits go offshore to where the majority of their investors are. The resource super profits tax represents the long-needed change that the people of Flynn and the people of Australia deserve. It will finally give people back their fair share. As I have said publicly, I am happy to die in a ditch over this; I fully support it. It is sound economic policy and it is good news for the people of Australia and the people of Flynn.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the significance of this budget and our country’s achievements. We stand today with a healthy economy that has been strengthened by responsible management and decisive action through the previous budget. With continued responsible management the government will be back in the black in three years. This budget implements key investments in areas of great importance to the people of Australia. It is a fine vessel from which our country can launch into another era of great economic growth and prosperity. I commend with pride these bills to the House.

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (4.57 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011 and related bills. This is my 15th and final budget debate. It has been an absolute privilege to take part in the debate as the member for Hughes over those years. My first budget, the Howard government’s first budget, handed down on the evening of 20 August 1996, heralded the start of a significant change in Australia’s economic prosperity. It received the headline ‘The fair go budget’ because the measures taken were mindful of the tough choices that come with economic responsibility and with experience that had brought a finally honed sense of social awareness. I also remember my contribution in the 2006 budget debate. I spoke on the magnificent milestone of the Howard coalition government eliminating the $96 billion of debt that Labor left to the Australian people when it was last voted out of office.

Unfortunately, I also remember the second Rudd Labor government budget last year—an extraordinary fiscal turnaround, where Labor undid 10 years of hard work by the Howard coalition government in less than 18 months. This was no small feat for a Prime Minister who once described himself as a fiscal conservative. The people of Australia now know that this Prime Minister says a lot but delivers very little. Many Australians are angered by what
Kevin07 has become. In 2010, commentators are now describing this as the worst government since Whitlam; it is all talk and no action. However, this has not come about overnight; it is the result of failure after failure by this government and the Prime Minister and, unfortunately, they do not seem to be learning at all from their mistakes. In just a few years, the Rudd government has been responsible for, and accountable for, a litany of policy failures due to its unconscionable haste in implementation and its gross mismanagement in planning and operation.

The government’s failures can be explained in three categories: (1) monumental, (2) currently in the process of failing and (3) doomed to failure. Many Australians will recall the Prime Minister’s 2020 summit. Greatly lauded, it turned out to be the first of many failures. It was simply a celebrity talkfest. The 2020 summit brought 1,000 of the best and brightest to Canberra at a cost of millions of dollars, and it came up with few useable policy ideas. One of them was to have a review of Australia’s tax system—and we all know what happened with that. But I will talk about that in a moment. This was also the first instance where we saw the Prime Minister’s preference for talk over action.

Then came the government’s GroceryWatch, a costly fiasco and long abandoned. And we should not forget Fuelwatch, another costly fiasco that has also been abandoned. Fuelwatch was an interesting case. It may have been the first time the Prime Minister was found out being untruthful with the Australian public. The Prime Minister was caught out when a report from his own department contradicted everything that he was saying in relation to the scheme’s impact on fuel prices.

The Rudd Labor government has also let down Indigenous Australians. Mr Rudd did say sorry to the stolen generation—and I am on the record as welcoming this initiative. Many Australians may not have heard of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program, but Indigenous Australians are well aware of this policy. It is a case of complete mismanagement. Last year, the ABC reported on Lateline that the program ‘has yet to build one single house’, despite $45 million of its $675 million budget already having been spent. A report from August 2009 said that the program was being criticised as too slow to deliver, its governance was overly bureaucratic and it was too costly in terms of its unit cost of housing and administration. The program has now been revised but the budget is still $672 million, with each new house expected to cost up to $520,000 after factoring in a proportion of administration costs and contingencies. As at February this year, two out of a target of 750 houses have been completed and 70 out of 2,500 refurbishments have finally been finished. It is a long way to a successful strategic housing implementation policy for Indigenous Australians. How much longer must they wait?

A program with similar problems concerning value for money but which has received even more publicity is known to parents as the ‘Julia Gillard memorial hall program’, but known officially as Building the Education Revolution. The Prime Minister-in-waiting was let loose with $16.2 billion. It has turned out to be a mistake. The only positive accomplishment from this program has been to show how much better the independent education sector is at investing government money than the heavyweight state education bureaucracies around Australia are. Fifteen months ago, the Building the Education Revolution program was the showpiece of the economic stimulus package of the Rudd Labor government. But now, millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money has been squandered, and the government was certainly warned...
about it. For example, $800,000 for a school toilet block, which should have cost around $170,000, is more than parents can understand. Spending millions on a single-room school in the country that was actually marked for closure next year is an insult to hardworking parents and teachers in our school communities.

And then there is the Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts. I am unaware of any program in which he has been concerned that has not been involved in controversy. First, there was the solar initiative that was abruptly ended three weeks early with only eight hours notice. This not only caused chaos and uncertainty within the industry, with many people intending to lodge applications missing out; it also caused the closure of many existing businesses across Australia that had invested significantly in this promised new environmentally responsible industry.

Then came the green loans mess. People gave up their jobs and paid $3,000 for specialist qualifications and insurance, to be trained as assessors, only to find that the demand for green loans had been grossly exaggerated. Many more assessors were trained than the program envisaged. And, after paying their fees and doing the training, they found that there was no work for the vast majority of them.

The most infamous of all has been the Home Insulation Program. This debacle was so poorly designed and implemented that it had to be scrapped—tragically, too late for four young men and their families. There were others who were injured. Over 87 homes have been lost to fire. There are thousands more homes that are still at risk. Millions of dollars of government money has been wasted. This was a giveaway program which was a disaster because of the lack of ministerial management, competence and accountability.

As a matter of fact, I met a lady, a constituent, at the local hairdresser who was told that it would cost $500 for her to have the insulation batts removed from her roof. She did not require them and she did not ask for them. She was bullied by the subcontractors. She already had insulation batts in her roof. She cannot use certain electrical appliances because she is fearful of a fire in the roof. She said it is going to cost her $500 to have the insulation removed. This is a woman who is a pensioner. She is a single lady who lives by herself, and she is very worried and daunted by the prospect of finding the money.

At every stage of the unfolding disaster of mismanagement, experts warned the environment minister that the program was gravely flawed, but there still was no action taken. This has been the biggest admission of policy and delivery failure in recent political history. The scale of the failure and the impact on the community has been massive, and it was only made worse when the government scrapped the insulation replacement program. This has well and truly put a bulldozer through the whole insulation industry in Australia, ruining longstanding small family businesses. Many are left in debt or are bankrupt and many more are without jobs.

On a further policy failure, something which I have been passionately against has been the ETS. The government attempted to railroad the ETS legislation through the House of Representatives and the Senate before Copenhagen for no reason other than that it would have allowed Mr Rudd to strut the world stage. The Prime Minister went to Copenhagen, taking 114 staff—one of the largest of the 190 delegations—at huge cost to the Australian taxpayer and the world’s environment, for yet another failed policy.
Another policy failure of this government is the change to the immigration laws. So far in 2010 we have seen the arrival of 68 boats, carrying 3,354 people. This is more than three per week. We have had seven boats, carrying 336 people, in just the last nine days. The unprecedented rate of illegal boat arrivals has overwhelmed our detention centres. In November 2007 there were just four people in detention who had arrived in Australia illegally by boat. Today there are more than 3,300 illegal boat arrivals in detention. Labor’s border protection policies are also proving to be as inhumane as they are ineffective. There is nothing humane about a policy that has attracted 6,389 people, being trafficked by criminals in 136 leaky boats for huge profit. There is nothing humane about an increase in the number of children being kept in detention from just 21 in 2007 to more than 450 today.

This government has also reopened the Curtin detention centre in remote Western Australia. Those being transferred to Curtin are being detained indefinitely under the Prime Minister’s new, discriminatory asylum freeze—a knee-jerk policy. This is in stark conflict with the government’s stated detention principles, which prohibit indefinite detention. The only boats that this Prime Minister is stopping are those carrying minerals to our export markets.

Other policy failures of half-hearted implementation that I do not have time to report in detail include the trades training centres—where are they? The childcare centres in schools—where are they? There is the increasing cost of child care. The GP superclinics—where are they? There is the promise to take Japan to court on whaling; the health reforms, which so far are just a taxpayer-funded advertising campaign; and the National Broadband Network, which was to cost $4 billion but then became $7 billion and now is up to $43 billion. The internet filter—where is it? The failures include the computers in schools program, which delivered only one-quarter of what was promised for double the cost; the bank guarantee that contributed to more than 200,000 investment accounts being frozen; the homeland security department; cuts to IVF; private health rebates, cataract surgery, the home savers account and Ruddbank; the promise to reduce consultancy fees to the government, which have now blown out to almost $1 billion; uranium contracts and relations with India; the Asia-Pacific body; and tens of millions of taxpayers’ dollars spent because the Prime Minister wants a United Nations Security Council seat. So does the buck still stop with this Prime Minister?

However, the greatest concern at present is this government’s obsession with introducing new taxes. Who would have thought that a review of Australia’s tax system would have resulted in more taxes? The Rudd mining tax is a bad tax: it is bad for investment, it is bad for jobs, it is bad for consumers and it is bad for investor confidence. It is a triple whammy on jobs, on retirees and on consumers. It is a damaging retrospective tax which is a dagger aimed at the heart of Australia’s prosperity. The coalition will oppose it in opposition and rescind it in government. And one of the things that the Rudd Labor government has failed to appreciate is that a vast number of people in Australia who own shares in mining companies are hardworking ordinary Australian families. Many of them are now self-funded retirees. Many of them are families who have wanted to invest in Australia’s prosperity. And these are the people, the ordinary hardworking Australian families, who will be hurt by this tax.

A national policy, as we know, has local impacts. I have an engineering company in my electorate. It is called Williamson Tool and Engineering. It has been in my electorate for three generations. It employs 25 workers, who all derive their livelihoods from working for this company. It produces heavy equipment for the mining industry, and it is very worried about
the uncertainty of whether it will have orders to ensure the future of its employees. As a matter of fact, many of its orders have been put on hold until further notice. So often the impact of national policies is felt in the local area, especially in an area like mine, the electorate of Hughes, which is a residential area in southern Sydney. This tax has a very negative impact on workers in my electorate.

It is the retrospectivity of the government’s new tax that upsets the miners and the investors the most. The Rudd government deceitfully confuses economic and accounting profits to make its super tax claims. The major aspect of any investment analysis for a mining project includes a detailed assessment of risk, and this has been totally ignored by this big-spending government in its grab for tax cash. Risk assessment measures the premium investors require above the tax-free rate for the investment to proceed or for a mine to commence. Miners, for instance, will include within their analysis of risk hazard components the possibility of cyclone events, the possibility of drought events and the possibility that their test drilling assessment of ore body size may be overly optimistic. Outrage risk, on the other hand, is a far higher and less predictable component of risk. Many insurance products, for instance, will not cover outrage risk. Insurance companies often disclaim outrage risks as acts of God, refusing to cover claims for massive floods, for instance.

The mining sector and its ability to attract capital investment must therefore self-insure against both hazard and outrage risks, which it does by assessing each investment hurdle rate at multiples of up to two, three or four times the government’s risk-free rate of return, which today sits at 5.7 per cent. In other words, miners will not invest, nor will they attract capital to invest, unless the mine achieves an investment hurdle rate that takes the many risks involved into account. To confuse the Australian public into thinking super profits emerged after the mine has recorded a risk-free rate of return of five to six per cent is to totally misconstrue the fact that investors require a hurdle rate of return to risk their capital in the first place. By saying that its current super tax strategies only tax super profits, the government has been empirically dishonest. It has failed to account for or acknowledge the risk premium involved in mining that all mining shareholders have historically taken. It is this fundamental dishonesty which has increased our country’s sovereign risk profile overnight. Any proposed change in future tax imposts allow investors to recalibrate their investment decisions. To attack historical investment is, however, not only deceitful to current mining shareholders; it is totally un-Australian and smacks of unfair play. Our long-term international investment attractiveness may have been irreversibly damaged.

The Leader of the Opposition in his budget reply speech set down the coalition’s vision for Australia, in contrast to the government’s:

The coalition wants an Australia that is prosperous, united and respected, where families’ choices are taken seriously by government; where pensioners and carers are regarded as people who have served and are serving our country; where officials understand that the public are their masters, not their servants; where migrants are welcome but borders are secure; where people’s taxes give them decent hospitals and proper highways; and where the armed forces represent our country’s best values. But we also know that government cannot solve all problems immediately and that overpromising and underdelivering politicians are the cause of so much cynicism about public life. This coalition will provide strong economic management. Tony Abbott and the Liberals will balance the budget, reduce Labor’s debt, ease financial pressure on Australian families and protect jobs. We will protect private health insurance and improve local health services. We
will fight to take pressure off families and public hospitals by opposing Labor’s cuts to the private healthcare rebate.

We also believe Australia’s local hospitals need more doctors, nurses and beds, not more bureaucrats. Our plan for re-election will help our public hospitals with strong local hospital boards that will put patients first. We will implement a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme, and our scheme will provide six months parental leave at full pay, giving women real time and real money to care for their newborns.

We are serious about border security. People smuggling is an inhuman business that puts lives at risk. Vulnerable people die on unseaworthy boats. Furthermore, every place provided to a person who has arrived illegally by a leaky boat is a place denied to another person who is waiting endlessly in a refugee camp in another country, potentially in great need and seeking to come to Australia by legal means. (Time expired)

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (5.17 pm)—I thank the chamber for the 13 minutes I have left to speak on this matter. I enjoy listening to opposition members’ speeches about budgets and policy, because they are ‘gunna gunna’ do a lot of ‘gunna gunna’. But they had twelve years to ‘gunna do something’ and unfortunately they did not find the time or opportunity or enough in the boom times to deliver on the ‘gunna gunna do’ things.

I am proud to stand here and talk about the things we are actually doing and the things we are actually delivering after only 2½ years of being in government. In this budget, we are strengthening and broadening the economy and taking very important steps to make sure there is fairness in the things that we do. We have a simpler tax system. We have a long-term plan for better superannuation. We are also talking about less tax for business, and especially for small business. The opposition are supposedly friends to small business, but they could not find it in their hearts in 12 years to lower tax rates and do more for small business.

Just as importantly, if not more importantly, the Commonwealth is providing vital infrastructure and playing a key role in, for example, Queensland and Western Australia—the mining states, where you need that infrastructure. You need government to be in there making sure that infrastructure is delivered.

We also want to make sure that all Australians share in the benefits that come from the economy. We want to make sure they get a fairer share of that. We want to make sure that we continue to have a positive impact on jobs, a positive impact on growth and a positive impact on savings. No report is more indicative of that than the Intergenerational report, which shows us—and I have time to mention only a couple of facts—that by 2050 there will be twice as many 65-year-olds and four times as many 85-year-olds as there are today. The most startling figure of all—which government needs to sit up and take notice of—is that today there are about five Australians working for every person aged over 65, but in 2050 there will only be 2.7.

So the government has to take very serious policy decisions today. We have to make sure that we do the right things for future generations. It is not just about what is popular today; it is about what needs to be done in terms of the economy in the long term. One of the key things that we can do to sustain the national economy is to reduce company tax. It is one of the biggest things we can do. Reducing company tax is something that you would expect the Liberal Party to champion. Reducing company tax below 30 per cent was almost thought im-
possible, but it will be a Labor government that will reduce it below 30 per cent, to a magic number: one with a ‘2’ in front of it. That is something that the Liberal Party should take note of. We want to fund that. We want to make that happen, and we can make that happen. We want to get the company tax rate down to 28 per cent. We want to make sure we can boost the retirement savings of individual people, so that they have got something to show for it and are more independent in their retirement. They are the things we want to do. And we want to make sure we increase infrastructure spending, as we already have, through a range of things.

Before I get onto that, I want to congratulate the Treasurer, because I think he has done a great job in very tough times. I have always had the view that it is easy to be a good treasurer when times are good but much more difficult, complex and painful to be a good treasurer when times are tough. And those are the times we are facing now. Wayne Swan has been the Treasurer during the global financial crisis, and I think it is testament to the hard work that he has done as Treasurer—and also to the hard work done by the government—that Australian debt has been kept low, making sure that we are at the lowest end of the OECD in terms of government debt. And we have kept jobs strong. Numbers of jobs have actually grown when in other economies they have fallen. We have kept the national economy strong, but we have also kept growth strong. So people have not only their jobs but also their pay packets.

We hear the opposition talk about ‘wasting money’, and I keep thinking, ‘What are they talking about when they say “wasting money”? We are certainly not ‘wasting’ it on schools or education. We certainly could not be ‘wasting’ it on health and other great programs like that. I find it really interesting to hear the opposition talk about computers in schools and say that they would end this program. I would find it hard to go up to a year 9 or year 10 student and say, ‘You’ll be one of the ones who misses out if the opposition is elected, because they do not want you to have some of the latest technology—technology that you already understand and use at home but you can’t quite access in your school.’ I think every child should have those opportunities.

We are doing a range of things in education—things that might have been thought impossible but which are taking place right now. Drive to any electorate in this country and go and look at any school, and you will see the growth in employment, the jobs created, and the school buildings that are going up, whether those are new skills training centres, science blocks, libraries or halls, or refurbishments—whatever that school needed. There was no qualification, in or out, in terms of what the school needed; it was up to the school community to decide. I think that has been one of the greatest programs that this country has seen in over three decades—a real investment in schools and a real investment in education for our kids. It is also a real investment in job creation.

In my electorate, there have been over 512 projects—512 individual projects that had real people working in them, creating real things. They have been creating a lasting legacy that will help young people to learn better, to learn in better environments, to provide what those schools had been begging for but could never fundraise for. Some schools could never have contemplated that these projects would happen in their lifetimes, they were so significant. Under Building the Education Revolution in my electorate, there were 46 schools, 153 programs and funding of $107 million plus. Under the National School Pride Program, there were 46 schools, 91 projects and funding of $7½ million. Under Primary Schools for the 21st Century, there were 43 schools, 61 projects and funding of $99 million. Under Science and
Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary Schools: one school; one project of $1.3 million. I do not know how the opposition can claim that this is a waste of money. But I can assure you that when I talk to the parents, the students themselves, the teachers, the school principals and the school communities, they are thankful, and they are thankful for a good reason because these are the sorts of facilities that they have been trying to build or have wanted in their schools for many years but could not achieve—certainly not through sausage sizzles or chook raffles.

We have done a lot on the economy to manage it through the global financial crisis. One of the most telling signs is the fact that Australia has maintained a very strong position in terms of its fiscal balance and its finances. We have maintained our AAA credit rating, and we have actually cut taxes in the last three budgets and will continue to cut taxes in the budgets to come.

When it comes to health, we have started the National Health and Hospitals Network program, which is going to deliver better hospitals. In the wasted 12 years that the former government had, they had opportunity. There were things they could have done in health. But, while people screamed for more beds or a better system, a national system, a better approach to hospitals and hospital funding, the then government sat and did nothing at all—except for one thing. They did rip out a billion dollars worth of funding. We are creating a thousand new nursing training places and we are going to double the number of GP training places as well. We are investing in new cancer research and treatment centres, desperately needed facilities, desperately needed people and desperately needed training places. We have invested billions of dollars in this area because it is something that needs to happen.

I want also to talk briefly about a very important segment of our community, and that is our seniors, who have contributed all their lives to the economy in good times and in bad times and who ought to be rewarded. One of the greatest things we could have ever done—that any government could have ever done—was to actually listen to seniors, particularly single seniors. They really needed some assistance with the pension, and that is exactly what they got from us. For single pensioners, there was an increase of $100 a fortnight, or $200 a month, and for couple pensioners an increase of $76 a fortnight, or $152 a month. That is something that has not been seen for over 30 years, something that many people thought was not possible. That is a huge ongoing commitment, budget to budget, year on year, into the future from the Rudd Labor government. Not only did we do that but we also understood that pensioners needed more than that. They also needed an increase in rent assistance. At the same time, we accompanied these increases with an increase in the cut-out amounts for income and assets so that pensioners had more in their pockets—they could keep more of these increases.

One of the greatest things we did on coming to government—and it is still part of the work we are doing in these budgets—was to abolish Work Choices and to restore fairness into workplaces. That might be something that the opposition scoffs at, but for ordinary working people it was an important, fundamental, structural rock in terms of maintaining their ability to have a decent workplace, a decent job and a decent pay packet at the end of the week.

I want to mention briefly also the resource super profits tax. While a lot has been said, there are a number of facts that just cannot be escaped. The fact is that there needed to be taxation reform in the resources sector. The best way to do this—as agreed by the miners and as agreed by everybody, it seems, except perhaps the Leader of the Opposition—was through
a profits tax based system. There is perhaps one other, Clive Palmer, who does not accept it, but everybody else does. All agree that this is the best method forward because not only does it provide in the good times; it also provides in the bad times when the booms are not there and the royalties just are not flexible enough. There is so much more that can be done.

As the smoke and fog lift and all of the misleading arguments that are being put forward about what this tax represents become clearer, ordinary people in the community have a better understanding that this is a tax that will help them. It is a tax that provides from a resource that belongs to all Australian people and it will help keep this economy strong in the good times and in the bad times, particularly when the boom times end for a period, as they always do in cycles. They boom and bust. This tax will actually provide for the mining companies as well. This is absolutely the best way forward and is something that ought to be supported in this place as well.

Most importantly, it provides for a very generous cut to the company tax rate to below 30 per cent, down to 28 per cent. The many hundreds of thousands of small businesses in this country have yet, perhaps, to fully comprehend what that means to them and what that means to all companies in Australia—that significant decrease of the company tax rate to below 30 per cent. I think that is something that has been long awaited and is very important but can only be delivered through the proper application of tax reform, and that is exactly what this government is doing.

It is always a tough job being a reformist government. It is always a tough job when you take on issues of taxation, but in the end you do it, you hold the line and you believe in what you are doing because it delivers for ordinary people, it delivers for the economy, it delivers for every single Australian and it delivers for small business people in this country. It ensures that we sustain the economy for jobs, for growth and for national savings. It underpins what will be the case in 10 years, 15 years or 20 years time.

I recall in debates in the past that, when it came to reform in the taxation area, there were always calls about it being the end of industry and that there would be no more jobs—and they were always wrong. The reality is that mining and the resource sector will continue to grow, as will our economy, as will jobs and as will the fair share of profits from the resource tax to make sure that all Australians get their fair share of what is, in the end, their resources.

**Dr Emerson** (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (5.30 pm)—I am pleased to bring the second reading debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011 and the cognate bills to a close. This budget contains measures to boost the economy’s capacity and support economic growth by building skills and infrastructure. It contains measures that support saving for the future and ease cost-of-living pressures today. This budget implements the government’s tax reform agenda, making the tax system stronger, fairer and simpler. It invests in Australia’s health, with significant further investments in our National Health and Hospitals Network. This budget builds on the support provided to the economy during the economic downturn and delivers on the government’s commitment to return the budget to surplus as the economy recovers. We will see the budget return to surplus within three years. This is three years ahead of schedule and ahead of every major advanced economy.
We are investing $661 million in skills and training, which will include 70,000 new training places and support for 22,500 apprenticeships. The government’s Skills for Sustainable Growth will boost the skills of Australian workers and ensure that the education and training system is responsive to the needs of the economy. Foundation skills of literacy, numeracy and language, crucial to job seekers and for those wishing to upskill, will be provided. These investments in Australian workers will lead to higher workforce participation and higher productivity. This budget makes a $996 million equity investment in the Australian Railtrack Corporation for upgrades to major rail freight networks to increase Australia’s economic capacity.

This budget takes important steps to increase national savings. The government is introducing a tax discount for interest income and introducing reforms to deliver a saving and superannuation system that is fairer for low-income earners and provides flexibility for those needing to save as they approach retirement. The government has implemented policies that will ease the cost of living for working families and make tax returns simpler and fairer. Another round of personal income tax cuts is delivered, meeting the government’s commitment to deliver real benefits for working families. Tax time will be simplified through the provision of a standard deduction for work related expenses for Australian workers.

The 2010-11 budget invests an additional $2.2 billion over four years in the government’s health and hospital reform, with a focus on better hospitals, improved primary care and preventative health care. In this budget the government will provide a further $522.7 million over four years for Australia’s nursing workforce. The nurse’s role in general practice will be expanded, particularly in prevention and chronic disease management, and nurses will receive additional training and education in aged care. The government will commit $416.8 million over four years to improve after-hours access to GPs and to establish Medicare Locals across the country. We are providing an additional $355.2 million over three years to increase the number of GP superclinics. This will make it easier for people to access high-quality and comprehensive primary care services in one community location.

The government has succeeded in protecting the Australian economy and people through the worst of the economic downturn. I commend Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2010-2011 and the cognate bills to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a second time.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2010-2011

Consideration in Detail

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—The Main Committee will now consider the bill in detail. In accordance with standing order 149, the Committee will first consider the schedule of the bill.

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (5.34 pm)—I suggest that it may suit the convenience of the Main Committee to consider the items of proposed expenditure in the order shown in the schedule which has been circulated to honourable members. I also take the opportunity to indicate to the Main Committee that the proposed order for consideration of port-
folios’ estimates has been discussed with the opposition and other non-government members, and there has been no objection to what is proposed.

The schedule read as follows—

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Portfolio
Health and Ageing Portfolio
Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio (Foreign Affairs)
Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio (Trade)
Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Portfolio
Human Services Portfolio
Climate Change and Energy Efficiency Portfolio
Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Portfolio
Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio
Defence Portfolio (Defence)
Defence Portfolio (Veterans’ affairs)
Attorney-General’s Portfolio
Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio
Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio
Finance and Deregulation Portfolio
Treasury Portfolio
Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is it the wish of the Main Committee to consider the items of proposed expenditure in the order suggested by the minister? There being no objection, I will allow that course.

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

Proposed expenditure, $7,112,296,000

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (5.35 pm)—I understand that education has been allotted about one hour in this debate on appropriations. Usually the minister likes to respond to a series of questions and so forth, and on the opposition side we plan to have me, the minister representing the shadow minister for employment, Michael Keenan, and the shadow minister for child care, Sharman Stone, asking questions. Then there may well be some backbench members in particular seats who also wish to put questions to the minister in this section of the debate on appropriations. So that is how we propose to do it. It is possible that the government also has people who want to put questions to the minister. She can respond as we go along, but I think that in the past she has often waited until the end, and it is up to her to decide whether she answers as we go.

The number of questions the opposition would like to ask—and I have a series of them—is 13. They deal with schools, the EIF, the Rural Hardship Fund, TEQSA and trade training centres. Firstly, can the minister explain how frequently she has met with Brad Orgill and
whether he has provided her with any examples of waste or mismanagement since the task force was formed on 12 April?

Secondly, how much is Mr Orgill being paid in his capacity as head of the implementation task force? Thirdly, in her media release of 12 April, the minister said the task force would:

… employ or contract investigators with a range of skills in building, design construction and safety, quantity surveying, architecture, financial audit and law.

Can the minister advise how many financial auditors or forensic accountants have been contracted to or employed by the task force and how many quantity surveyors have been contracted to or employed by the task force?

Fourthly, can the minister provide the opposition with access to the contractual documentation for each individual BER project for the following states: Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT, and if not, why not?

Fifthly, given that the Prime Minister promised that, under the government’s computers in schools program, students would be provided with high-speed broadband access by the end of 2011, can the minister provide an update on when the computers are due to be connected at 100 megabits per second fibre broadband in order to keep the promise and how many computers have been connected thus far at 100 megabits per second?

Sixthly, can the minister explain the rationale behind the review of the National School Chaplaincy Program, which began under the previous government? A previous survey indicates that it has the strong support of 97 per cent of school principals who have engaged a chaplain. They have recognised the benefits of the program for their communities, so why is it only funded until 2011, given that it has proven to be so successful in its current form?

In the minister’s media release of 13 May 2008 on higher education, she said of the Education Investment Fund:

The government will also allocate funds from the 2007-08 and 2008-09 surpluses, along with money from the higher education endowment fund to create a new $11 billion Education Innovation Fund, to support higher education and vocational education and training.

How can the minister justify, in terms of this year’s budget, that there is no evidence that a top-up of the $5 billion has occurred as promised?

What is the current status of the $20 million Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund that was negotiated between the minister and the Australian Greens during the youth allowance debate, given that it is due to come into operation in January next year? What form will it take, who will be eligible to apply and what sort of assistance will be offered to students? Or is the fund just more evidence of policy on the run without any thought about what the fund would actually do?

In terms of TEQSA, I refer to concerns about the proposed internal working structures of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, the time lines for the establishment of the agency and the adequacy of funding for the role it is to be tasked with. (Extension of time granted) Is the TEQSA another example of Labor making significant commitments but being shambolic in their implementation?

With respect to the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program, how many trade training centres are currently open and operational from the first round of the program? How many
trade training centres are currently open and operational from the second round of the program? Of the currently open and operational projects, how many are in non-government schools? How many trade training centres from round 2 are operational and, of these, how many are attached to non-government schools?

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (5.41 pm)—Has the minister seen the statistics in the weekend Age on the shortage of school places and school classrooms in the inner city? How has this affected school places in inner Melbourne? Is this demographic drift affecting children and classrooms in other cities? What is the effect of the government’s existing programs, including Building the Education Revolution, on this problem of shortage of school spaces in the inner city? Furthermore, can the minister outline the importance of investing in teacher quality? What is the number of teachers that the government proposes to receive such extra education—higher education or further education? And what is the aim of the program—what do we hope that teachers will emerge from such programs with? I will leave my questions on child care for the appropriate place later.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (5.42 pm)—I rise to address some of the questions that have been asked in this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2010-2011. I indicate, of course, that the debate on the appropriation bill is supposed to be a debate on the appropriation bill. Most of the questions put to me by the shadow minister do not really relate to appropriations in the budget papers or in budget announcements or to new programs in the budget papers.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—At some point the opposition might want to decide whether they want to listen to the answers or just sit and shout. If they want to just sit and shout then we will leave them to it, but if they want to listen to the answers then we expect them to listen. Amid the characteristic disregard for any of the details or the deep concerns about education in the community being shown by that behaviour, let me now respond to the shadow minister.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt would assist the order of the House if he would allow the minister to be heard in silence.

Ms GILLARD—The shadow minister raised some questions about Mr Orgill and the Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce. He raised some questions particularly about payment. That is a matter that is dealt with by the Remuneration Tribunal—that is, it is dealt with independently.

He raised some questions about the identity of the people serving on the task force. This was actually the subject of quite extensive recent publicity, including in the Australian newspaper, but we are obviously happy to supply to the shadow minister—should he have missed the media reports—the details of the people who are assisting Mr Orgill. These include people with quantity surveying expertise and people with, literally, a lifetime of experience in building and construction.

The documents within the reach of the task force—I have answered this question in the House of Representatives—are defined by our national partnership agreements that support Building the Education Revolution. Mr Orgill is able to use the powers of the Commonwealth

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to get all documents necessary that are held by education authorities to assist his inquiries. The task force has already analysed all complaints that the BER national coordinator has received since the inception of the program as well as 40 or so complaints that have been sent directly to the task force through their website. On the basis of this, the task force has already formulated a program of visits to schools to benchmark BER projects across jurisdictions and to investigate complaints. The task force will be producing a report in August. I have met personally with Mr Orgill and I have indicated to him personally—and have indicated publicly—that should Mr Orgill wish to produce any early recommendations the government is all ears for those recommendations and will respond to them as quickly as possible after they are received.

We can provide the shadow minister with details of the task force members, obviously, but he may have seen the report in the Australian newspaper on 3 June following the announcement by Mr Orgill of other task force members. There are two deputy chairs. One is David Chandler, a former chief executive, director, adviser and chairman in public and private sectors. He received an Order of Australia in 1989 for services to the construction industry. He owns a consulting practice known as Resolution Services Group. The other deputy chair is Mr Alex Buchan. He is the Senior Director of Altus Page Kirkland. He has 15 years of experience and is an expert in selection of procurement and delivery methods for large construction projects. The task force is supported by an advisory panel, including Leonie Trimper, the head of the Primary Principals Association; Uschi Schreiber, a Managing Partner of Ernst & Young; Michael Heenan a principal of Allen Jack+Cottier, Alan Duncan who is the director of a quantity surveying firm—(Time expired)

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (5.48 pm)—I have a series of three questions and I suppose in keeping with the way this has worked it might just be easier for me to run through them than have the minister respond, as seems to be the process. On the ABC's 7.30 Report on 30 April 2007, prior to the setting up of Labor’s Fair Work Australia, Kevin Rudd said:

I will not be prime minister of this country and appoint some endless tribe of trade union officials to staff or ex trade union officials to staff the key positions in this body.

My first question is: how does the minister justify this comment in light of the fact that six of the last seven appointees to Fair Work Australia are ex-union employees? Is this another one of Labor’s broken promises? I am happy to run through the list of the minister’s appointments for her: John Ryan, a former Senior National Industrial Officer with the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association; Michelle Bissett, a Senior Industrial Officer with the Australian Council of Trade Unions; Julius Roe, former National President of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union; Anne Gooley, a lawyer and former senior official with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance; Danny Cloghan, former Secretary of the WA Prisons Union and long-time adviser to former Labor MP Jim McGinty. The only person that has been appointed to Fair Work Australia—contrary to the Prime Minister’s promise prior to the last election—that does not have a union background is Peter Hampton, who comes from Safe-Work South Australia.

My second question is: Minister, you promised that Fair Work Australia would approve enterprise agreements within seven days. This has now blown out to 17 weeks. How do you justify this or is this just another of Labor’s broken promises? My third question is: what has the minister done to address the plight of teenage workers Matthew Spencer and Letitia Harrison
at Terang in country Victoria, who have lost their afterschool jobs because of Labor’s new minimum hour laws? Why did you promise these teenagers that you would ensure that they were spoken to directly by various government departments when we now know that they have not been contacted at all? Is this just another broken promise?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (5.50 pm)—I will continue addressing the questions as asked. To finish the advisory panel, I think I was up to Doug Jones, who is a construction lawyer from Clayton Utz, and Eric Goodwin, who is a non-executive director of Eureka Funds Management and was formerly with Lend Lease. I think on any rational assessment that is a very high calibre set of appointments and a very high calibre panel.

I was asked about chaplains and the reason for the review. I believe the chaplains program has done and is doing a lot of good. I think chaplains are very valued by schools and I want to see us continue to support that assistance to schools. But because the chaplains program was run on an application based process, we have seen differential take up. If you analyse the take up between different states in Australia it is quite different. There is not a fair distribution, if I can put it that way.

If we analyse country and city there are some concerns. I think there is some evidence too that if you go through an application based process sometimes the leadership of the schools with the really acute needs are already under such pressure that they find it difficult to intersect with an application based process and might therefore miss the round. For those kinds of reasons we have determined that to ensure that there is a fair system and way of working that meets all needs, we are reviewing the chaplains program. We obviously have the funding. It is secure. Any fear campaign that the opposition members are raising about the funding is demonstrably incorrect. The funding is there to support chaplains as we work through some of these questions.

On the issue of the Education Investment Fund, the shadow minister might note that we are in the process of announcing some successful applicants from that fund. It continues to support strategic projects in universities and in vocational education and training. I direct his attention to some announcements made by the government as recently as last Saturday and last Friday.

On the rural hardship fund, the shadow minister is well aware that in order to secure passage of this legislation, which was much delayed, we needed to have conversations with senators and the opposition. We did have those conversations. We reached agreement with the opposition and with Greens senators, including an agreement about the $20 million hardship fund. The best way of distributing that to ensure maximum fairness is being worked through. That will be the aim of the fund, which is entirely appropriate.

On the issue of TEQSA, I must admit that my understanding is that the shadow minister is on some grand frolic of his own about this. We are deregulating a system so it can be demand driven. If you are deregulating a system so it can be demand driven you need to have strong quality assurance. I would have thought that was obvious to any student of public policy. I believe the shadow minister has announced that the view of the opposition is that Australian universities in the top 100 in one of the international rankings need not be regulated by TEQSA. They are obviously Group of Eight universities, and the Group of Eight has made it very clear that they do not support the shadow minister’s view. In my discussions with people
in the university sector there is grand bemusement about this approach from the shadow min-
ister: it is viewed as laughable, eccentric and strange. I think that is the explanation for TEQSA.

Mr Keenan interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—Before you insult a number of vice-chancellors, can I refer you to the
Group of Eight’s public statement on this matter.

On the question of teacher quality cuts—and I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for
asking me—we are investing in teacher quality, including bringing the best and brightest
graduates into teaching. We are investing in paying the best teachers more to go to the class-
rooms that need them the most. We are investing in more independence and autonomy for
public school principals. The threat to that investment is of course from the Leader of the Op-
position, who would cut all of this funding should he become Prime Minister of this country.
That would be a fundamental attack on the quality of schooling in this country, meaning that
some of these reform measures and drives—and I note the Deputy Speaker is from Western
Australia—including empowering public school principals to be the principals of independent
schools—(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—The member for Newcastle.

Mr Pyne—Labor had their turn. Julia took it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I am sorry. As I understand it, it is one after the other.

Ms Grierson interjecting—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—It would assist the order if the member for Newcastle could
resume her seat. I apologise. I call the member for Murray.

Dr STONE (Murray) (5.56 pm)—Thank you. In the budget the government allocated
$81.9 million to implement the new quality standards for early childhood education and child
care. Part of that, we are told, was for the first national ratings system for childhood education
services, we presume; early childhood education was included. Given childcare centres and
preschools are already accredited for subsidy purposes, how will this new rating system dif-
fier? How are providers being consulted on this? How often will the rating system be updated?
What criteria will be used to rank the services? Will there be any appeal mechanisms? Where
a service is ranked as poor will they be assisted in that service with extra finances or other
support to improve their service standards? How much of the $81.9 million is to be spent on
the new rating system—in other words, the new My School for preschools and child care—
and when will this new rating system commence?

In Budget Paper No. 2 under the ‘National quality agenda for early childhood education
and care’ national partnership implementation, we are told the government will provide
$130.4 million over four years to help support parents with the introduction of the new Na-
tional Quality Agenda. We all know that the new National Quality Agenda is going to increase
staff numbers in comparison with numbers of those in their care. It will require higher qualifi-
cations and smaller groups, and the estimations of increases in costs are up to $20 per day,
particularly for the younger children. You have said in the budget you are going to spend
$130.4 million over four years, in particular to help support parents. You go on to say in the budget:

The introduction of new national standards, which include improving child care ratios, will lead to increased Government assistance through the Child Care Rebate.

Given that statement, I would like you to explain why we were told very recently that the cap for the childcare rebate is being reduced. In fact, it has now been reduced to $7,500 and will no longer be indexed, for a period of four years. That seems to be in direct contradiction to your statement in the budget. We also want to know why, given you have said you are going to help parents with the increased costs of child care, you have abolished the start-up grants of $1,500 for family day care and the $5,000 start-up grants for family day care in the rural and regional sector.

We also want to know why through your minister, Minister Ellis, you have started to accredit part-time family day care for periods of only six months. These part-time long day care centres particularly exist in rural and remote areas. As you can understand, the six-months accreditation quite clearly means these centres are having difficulty attracting staff. They have a great deal of difficulty even with a start-up if they are going to get only six months accreditation at a time. In relation to early childhood education—I might have to continue this later—you made the statement that your government would provide universal access to early childhood education for every child of up to 15 hours in an accredited centre with a qualified person in the year before they start school.

Minister, I want to know: what does that really mean? Does it mean free? Does it mean for everyone in that category? Does it mean that for a place like Koondrook preschool centre, which closed the other day, you are going to rush out and reopen it? What does this ‘universal access to early childhood education’ mean? Out there in real constituent land they are confused because, with the stresses of the fees in early childhood education in some states and the drought and other difficulties, preschool centres are no longer able to afford to stay open, but you have claimed universal access is your commitment.

I am also very concerned about your commitment to how these centres are going to operate in the future and when the support for upgrades of qualifications is going to flow through. Quite obviously, in the area of early childhood education, there are centres that were previously child care providers wanting to move into early childhood education. When are these centres going to be able to access support for upgrading qualifications of their staff?

Let me also say that we are concerned with your data. It is very confusing. Can you give me a breakdown of exactly what you are going to spend category by category in the new quality standards support? I mentioned the amount of $81.9 million. That was to be spent, we are told, on helping with implementation of the new quality standards, but then we have a separate budget item of $130.4 million and it comes under implementation. Can we have a breakdown, please, of exactly what is included in those amounts? Quite clearly the childcare sector and early childhood education depends on adequate support—(Time expired)

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (6.01 pm)—My question to the minister goes to needs based funding. It has been an issue for so long in schools: having needs identified, responded to and resourced. I am pleased to say that in my electorate now eight schools are receiving low-socioeconomic assistance, but it has taken a long time. It is so much appreciated by those schools. Four schools are receiving literacy and numeracy funding. Can you tell us, Minister,
the impact this needs based approach—this identifying needs and funding on needs—is having around the country and how that will be maintained?

I would also like to mention a recent sod-turning at the Shortland wetlands—an international Ramsar wetland—where I was very pleased to have the director of Catholic education for the Hunter Region as well as NSW DET do a sod-turn for a partnerships project. The overwhelming view was that this could never have happened before. To see schools partnering with an international Ramsar wetlands to enhance the educational opportunities for all children in our region was something, certainly, that they were celebrating. What has been happening around that area, how have partnerships been forged and what will the benefits of those be?

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (6.03 pm)—I would like to ask the minister about the BER program and in particular the businesses in the central western part of New South Wales that were affected by the collapse of the construction company TCT Construction, a major subcontractor engaged as part of the BER program. As the minister is aware, there are bills owing to contractors, in particular in the Dubbo area, of approximately $1.7 million due to the collapse of TCT. In particular, Jarrod Kennedy from Jarrod Kennedy Welding is owed $60,000; Chris Haynes, a businessman from Coolah, is owed approximately $20,000—and there are many others. These businesses are in serious financial difficulty. I would like to ask the minister what she personally is doing to make sure that the interests of these businesses are taken care of. They believe that because they were working for the federal government they were indeed secure and that in fact they would be paid. I would ask the minister if she could respond to the concerns of those businesses.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (6.04 pm)—Just trying to take in turn and stay up with the order, I think the last question asked of me by the shadow minister was about trade training centres. Let me answer that. There are 147 projects underway to construct or refurbish trade training centres; 22 trade training centre projects have been completed; 42 school sites are delivering new trade qualifications as a result of trades training centre funding, benefitting 70 schools. By the end of 2010 approximately 68 trade training centre projects benefitting 173 schools are scheduled to be completed.

This is a 10-year program running exactly on time and exactly as promised, despite the continued misrepresentations of the opposition to the contrary. The great threat to this program is from the cutbacks promised by the Leader of the Opposition which mean that 1,800 schools will miss out on the opportunity to get a trade training centre. In addition, if the prospect of missing out was not bad enough, around 300 schools were promised money last November and they would have that money ripped out of their hands if the Leader of the Opposition becomes Prime Minister and implements that cut. The cuts he proposes will rip money out of the hands of 180 schools. If there is any shred of decency about the opposition, they will name those schools so schools know who will have the money ripped out of their hands after it was promised. Until the opposition does that, we will raise with every school the likelihood that they will be the ones to lose that money, to have it ripped out of their hands.

I am asked about Fair Work Australia appointments. It is a somewhat interesting question. Let me remind the Committee of the appointments made to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission by the former Howard government.
Mr Keenan—How is this remotely relevant?

Ms GILLARD—I think this is an important backdrop to the consideration of appointments. The former Howard government appointed 19 men and one woman. Why was it that across almost 12 years in industrial relations only one out of 20 appointments was a woman? Why was it that the Howard government when in office formed the view that women were too incompetent or too underqualified to take these appointments? I think that is a question working Australian women would be asking themselves. Of the appointments, only two had union backgrounds, one had a government background and the rest largely had employer backgrounds, including four former Liberal staffers. That is interesting—mates appointments.

On the question of who has been appointed to Fair Work Australia under this government, 19 appointments have been made so far—12 dual appointments and seven as a result of advertisements. They comprise 13 men and six women. It is a far better record than that of those opposite. Nine have a union background, four have an employer background, three have a legal background and three have a government background. We obviously want high-quality applicants to respond to the advertisements. Each appointment that has been made has been recommended by my department. I suggest to those opposite that if they are genuinely concerned about this matter then they should be encouraging high-quality applicants.

I am more than happy to answer the childcare questions, but I may need a little additional time to do that so I alert people to that now. Let me say to the shadow minister—and I know the shadow minister has been recently appointed to her job—that there is any amount of information in the public domain on the questions she has asked. The government has been through a huge consultation process on the quality agenda involving regulatory impact statements and COAG negotiations. Any amount of documentation is available and I would refer her to it. But she has made a completely incorrect statement about the effect of the quality agenda on childcare fees, and I do not want Australian parents to listen to that because it is simply not right. (Time expired)

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (6.09 pm)—I too want to raise some questions to the minister in relation to the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program. I believe I first wrote to the minister in about March last year to reflect the concerns put to me by several members of my community from within the building trade, the primary school sector and the school councils. I do thank the minister because, on most occasions, she responds very promptly to my correspondence. Though some other ministers are nowhere near as prompt, I do get responses. I am sorry that the paper warfare probably will continue in the future.

There were several concerns presented to the minister at that time, and many of them have come to fruition in relation to the value for money of this program. The schools in Gippsland that I have had much to do with are very concerned about the way this program was rolled out in terms of the template designs which were forced upon them and which were not necessarily what they wanted. In the Victorian sense, and certainly in the Gippsland sense, many of the schools had not done a master planning process to the extent that probably some of the independent and Catholic schools had and so they probably were not as well placed when the time came to roll out this program in the manner and time frames forced upon the school communities. I do not believe we necessarily got the value for money that we could have received if we had had a little more control of the funding at the local level. That has been a real concern for the state schools in my electorate.
The actual contracting process and the way in which the projects were packaged together also created some very serious anomalies in Gippsland. One of the most obvious ones was the Bairnsdale situation, where we had two Bairnsdale building firms given the opportunity to tender for three jobs. The three jobs were located in Foster, San Remo and Wonthaggi. Each of those towns is two or three hours away from Bairnsdale. The two Bairnsdale firms involved were not given the opportunity to tender for jobs in the state school system in their immediate area. Naturally, they did not even bother tendering for the jobs in Foster, San Remo and Wonthaggi and waited until the local Catholic primary school had jobs available for them to tender for, and they went through that process.

One of the other areas I want to raise with the minister relates to the issue of portable buildings. I believe many of my smaller communities could have leveraged off far more results for their school communities if—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms JA Saffin)—Excuse me, member for Gippsland, would you stop for a minute. We cannot hear.

Mr CHESTER—I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will talk a bit louder. Certainly in our smaller communities there is no doubt that having access to that money along the lines of the Investing in our Schools Program and the National School Pride Program, where the school councils had control of the money and, particularly those small school councils, were able to leverage off through their local parents and friends associations. What we have instead are demountable buildings on the backs of trucks being dropped off at some of these primary schools and, quite frankly, it has not been satisfactory.

The common remarks I have been getting from the school principals are that they have been happy to get some money but have been bitterly disappointed with the lack of value and the lack of transparency. Many of the schools have been worried about speaking out because they have basically been threatened by the departmental staff with, ‘You don’t want to go back down the pecking order, do you?’ I believe they have been intimidated into not speaking out on every issue they wanted to raise.

I have a couple of specific examples where people have spoken out and have contacted my office. I want to relate to the minister the experience of the Bairnsdale West Primary School, whose principal, Doug Vickers, wrote in his school newsletter quite recently: Bairnsdale West decided that, to maximise its allocation of $2 million, we needed to design our own building rather than by a state government template. We were not encouraged to follow this method. However, our end result, our plans which have now gone to tender indicate that we’ll get a building which contains a canteen, foyer area, toilets, full-size basketball court with seating and a music room for $1 million less than the template design which was taken up by Lucknow Primary School. Lucknow Primary School is about four kilometres away. My questions to you, Minister, really relate to the issue of delivering value for money.

Mr Danby interjecting—

Mr CHESTER—It did not work. The Lucknow Primary School has paid $1 million more for something that Bairnsdale West Primary School was able to achieve. If you think that worked, you are not much of a genius, pal. Minister, do you now agree that we have not got value for money in many of these schools? If we had our time again, would we give more control to the state school councils themselves? Do you acknowledge that this one-size-fits-all
approach with these template designs has resulted in some very poor outcomes for some of the regional state schools?

I want to speak about one primary school and the issue of demountable buildings. I recently visited the Gormandale Primary School, which had a demountable building delivered in February. When I visited the school last week, I was surprised to find that the school has no access to the building. There is no ramp and there are no steps. There is a gaping hole between the building and the existing pathway. There are two stumps under the building that do not have bolts connected to them and one broken concrete pad. The workmanship is quite shoddy. The reason I am surprised is that, on the government’s website, it is said that the project is complete. The power has not been connected but the project is complete, according to the government’s website. I ask the minister whether she can understand why there is a lot of anger and frustration in regional communities that we have not got value for money for taxpayers’ dollars.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (6.14 pm)—Can the minister please explain the Teach for Australia program that is underway in Victorian schools?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (6.14 pm)—Given we are starting to move towards the latter half, it might suit if I keep responding to questions—and I will respond to that one. I was addressing some of the questions from the shadow minister covering child care and early learning and I did want to correct a statement she made about the costs of the quality agenda. The claims made by her are simply incorrect. The modelling undertaken by Access Economics for COAG shows that the reforms are expected to result in an average out-of-pocket cost increase for a family on $80,000 of 57c per week in 2010-11—

Dr Stone—That is not what the sector is saying.

Ms GILLARD—The shadow minister is now shaking her head. If she wants to produce alternative modelling, she may. These are not my figures. Let me just clarify this for her: this is Access Economics modelling. It is 57c a week for a family on $80,000 in 2010-11 rising to $8.67 per week by 2014-15 for one child who attends full-time, long day care—that is, 50 hours per week.

Dr Stone interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—The shadow minister is saying to me that that is absurd. I am giving her the Access Economics modelling figures. If she wants to have an argument with Access Economics, I suggest she get them on the phone. She might want to then look at how many times the Howard government used Access Economics for modelling before she gets into this debate.

I will also correct a completely incorrect statement that the shadow minister made about the childcare tax rebate. Obviously the costs of the quality agenda are important. Surely, everybody would agree that having rigorous quality standards for child care is appropriate. We are talking about the care of children, for goodness sake! Rigorous quality standards are appropriate. The costs as modelled by Access Economics are as I have outlined them. The government, by increasing the childcare tax rebate to 50 per cent, is obviously partnering in those costs, and you see the consequences of that in the budget.

Dr Stone—But you just reduced the childcare tax rebate.
Ms GILLARD—The shadow minister, right on cue, now makes a comment about the childcare tax rebate. Let me give her the real figures, because she should think about the real figures. When she was sitting on the government side of the chamber, the maximum that a family could claim from the childcare tax rebate for out-of-pocket costs was $4,354. We came to office and increased it to $7,500. That is a difference of $3,146 for those families who are very high childcare users. That is not the normal pattern of care, but there are families that use that much care. For those families, the maximum amount has gone to $7,500. So I would ask the shadow minister in relation to the childcare tax rebate to perhaps explain to the Australian community why it was when she was a government member she thought $4,354 was an appropriate maximum but now she criticises the government for a $7,500 maximum. Heavens above—people understand hypocrisy, and the stench of it is rising!

On the question of Building the Education Revolution, I genuinely appreciate the problem that you have raised. My advice is that there are some legal questions here. So I would prefer to be a bit careful about what I say on the public record in relation to this, but obviously I do acknowledge that there are some real concerns in your local community.

My frequent correspondent friend, the member for Gippsland, does write a lot of letters and I do my best to keep up with him. I say this to him: I am all for better empowering principles. This government has undertaken more reforms in the empowerment of principles in 2½ years than occurred in the 12 long years before, including the independent public schools trial in Western Australia. We have done more in this area than was done in 12 years before. In terms of delivering economic stimulus, we relied—because we needed to deliver it quickly—on the ways of delivering school capital that were being used at that point, including through working through state departments for the delivery of that capital. (Time expired)

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (6.19 pm)—I rise to ask some questions about the silo mentality within government. The delivery of some outcomes on the ground for our area, broadly covering the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio, is dependent in the future on a couple of considerations by you as minister—not necessarily within the existing portfolio brief but in some critical areas alongside that.

As a low SES area we have been a priority employment area. That is starting to come to the end of its life. You will be pleased to know that the Small Area Labour Markets figures for our area show record levels, which is fantastic for us. We certainly want to keep that going. We have a jobs plan through the regional employment process that we want to have released sometime soon and will want to start implementing. That will transition over time and sit under Regional Development Australia. That is one of the silos that sit alongside DEEWR at the moment. So, my first ask is: with the jobs plan that is about to hit the ground and with the welcome money through the vocational education implementation plan that we have talked about over the past couple of weeks, where does RDA and RDA resourcing sit with regard to the delivery of DEEWR programs into the future?

Another silo is what FaHCSIA and the Attorney-General’s Department are doing, particularly with regard to Closing the Gap strategies. In my view that is an important contributor to our jobs plan, which we are starting to focus on more and more, with education being a critical part of that. Is there any consideration, from your end, to either resourcing or having greater input into how FaHCSIA delivers Closing the Gap strategies and how RDA does resourcing from its department? At the moment there is not much, and it is going to be a prob-
lem in the near future unless it gets some resources—particularly for programs through your department on the ground.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (6.22 pm)—I will definitely come to the member’s question but will first conclude on two other matters. I was indicating to my frequent correspondent that we are a government that has invested more in principal autonomy in state schools than any government before us. As a result of our Smarter Schools National Partnerships, the New South Wales government is trialling a pilot program in 47 schools identified as disadvantaged schools to increase school based decision making, including devolving more responsibility to local principals and flexibility in staffing and resource management. We are working in Queensland with principals in at least 10 per cent of government schools to operate in a more autonomous school environment by 2013. In Western Australia we are resourcing 34 state schools to become independent public schools. So it is okay to talk the talk about principal autonomy, but when we actually go to the scoreboard, this is a government that has delivered more in two and a bit years than we saw in the 12 years before.

On the question of the delivery of Building the Education Revolution, the biggest capital constructs are in primary schools. There are 7,700 of them; 5,500 of them are in state schools. This was a big capital construct that needed to be delivered quickly. The member is inviting people to conclude that it would have made sense for the first time ever to say to those 5,500 principals, ‘You do it this time, under time pressure, because it’s economic stimulus, rather than using the capital development mechanisms that are there.’ We relied for an urgent delivery of economic stimulus on the capital development mechanisms that were there. Of course I believe in principal autonomy. That is why, as Minister for Education, I have done more in that area than any education minister before me.

I am not sure whether the member for Stirling is still shadow minister for workplace relations or whether Senator Abetz is—it is too complicated to watch the Liberal Party’s chairs go around—but I want to correct a statement that the shadow minister made which is absolutely incorrect and ought not be in Hansard uncorrected. The member for Stirling made a statement about the employment of some young people in Terang. He suggested that their employment had a problem with workplace relations laws only as a result of our new, modern, simple award. That claim is 100 per cent untrue and completely wrong. The 1½ hour engagement of these young people was not in accordance with the pre-existing Victorian award, which had a two-hour minimum call-out period. Yes, it is not in accordance with the simple, modern award that has a three-hour minimum call-out period but to, firstly, suggest that the issue here only developed because of award modernisation and the fair work system is simply not true and ought not to be said by anybody who wants to be taken seriously. The question that the member for Lyne has raised with me is a very good one. I would like to congratulate him on his very persistent advocacy.

Mr Cheeseman—He stands up for his community.

Ms GILLARD—He does stand up for his community. He is a very vigorous advocate of his community. There are many people sitting in here and around him right now who could learn a lesson from the persistent, vigorous advocacy engaged in by the member for Lyne on behalf of his community. Because of his vigorous persistent advocacy, Labor have agreed to invest $150,000 in a program to be undertaken by the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council to
look at VET in his area, particularly at the low participation rates in his area. That is a long-standing problem. We obviously want to see people come through for higher qualifications.

The member for Lyne raised an issue of putting government services together. That is very important. We as a government are working our way through that. I would direct his attention to the ‘A stronger fairer Australia’ statement where a number of these things about whole-of-government responses and joined-up services, particularly for the most disadvantaged Australians, are canvassed. I would say to him: frankly, it is not easy. The silo mentality is very persistent. But we understand that families do not live in silos; they intersect with the world. And communities do not live in silos; they intersect with the world. This matter is certainly on our agenda and the details of that agenda are contained in the ‘fairer Australia’ statement. (Time expired)

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (6.27 pm)—My question to the Deputy Prime Minister relates to the Building the Education Revolution program, or the school hall program, that she is administering. I have written to her on several occasions about this. It relates specifically to cost shifting that the South Australian government is engaging in, which the Deputy Prime Minister quite clearly ruled out when she first announced this program, specifically in relation to the bushfire tanks in Yankalilla, Macclesfield, Basket Range and Stirling East and also in Eden Hills, which is in the member for Boothby’s electorate. Schools got initial quotes for buildings. Those quotes were changed post fact by the state Labor government, which were putting their requirements, somewhere between $50,000 and $100,000 worth of spending, on each of these bushfire tanks. My question to the Deputy Prime Minister is: will she ensure that the state Labor government stops cost-shifting, which she said they would not be allowed to do when she first announced this program?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (6.28 pm)—Can I respond to the member for Mayo’s question. The COAG reform process, including the national partnership agreements and the agreements that were struck to deliver economic stimulus, required maintenance of effort by jurisdictions. This is being monitored through a Treasury to Treasury process. Obviously, that is the best way of getting to all of the figures. I would remind him that the provision of capital tends to be lumpy capital. That is the term used. That means you can have budgeting for a big capital project in one year. So you should not necessarily expect to see ever-rising figures—it will depend. Pre-existing budget arrangements obviously had some variability in the figures year to year, depending on the size of construction projects being brought to a conclusion in any given year. But the COAG agreement process ensures maintenance of effort and, let me assure you, we are very serious about that.

On the question of the rainwater and bushfire arrangements that he talks about, my advice is that, because of new protocols about school construction in areas that could be affected by bushfire, if you are extending the footprint of the school then you need to extend the availability of water in emergency circumstances. Consequently, as we extend the footprint of the school through Building the Education Revolution then the availability of water is also being extended in accordance with those protocols. I have corresponded with him about that matter and that is the explanation: to make sure that with the new buildings we are acquitting the relevant obligations have been put in place to do the best to ensure that the schools are kept safe insofar as is possible during the circumstance of bushfire.
Mr PYNE (Sturt) (6.31 pm)—I note that the education appropriations started at about 5.40 pm, so we still have some time.

Mr Albanese—Weren’t you here?

Mr PYNE—We were here, but Craig Emerson went over.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms JA Saffin)—I will correct the honourable member. It started at 5.35 pm. I propose to finish at 6.35 pm.

Mr PYNE—So you have the delight of hearing from me for the next five minutes. I am delighted to be able to assist the Leader of the House and give him the information he so desperately needs to know about education. That is why you came early, I assume—so that you would be able to hear from me.

In the minister’s response to my questions about education, she neglected—I am sure inadvertently—to answer a number of the key questions I asked her. I will put them on the record again to give her the opportunity to take on notice and report back to the opposition at the appropriate time. For example, in answering the questions about the staff of the implementation task force, she answered by talking about the advisers who have been appointed as part of the deputy chairman’s panel for the chairman of the task force, Brad Orgill. The question I asked her was about the staff that he had appointed to assist him. We know the task force has appointed a media adviser, but we are actually asking if the minister is going to keep the promise she made on 12 April that Mr Orgill would appoint, as part of his staff—not as part of the advisory panel—investigators with a range of skills in building design, construction and safety, quantity surveying, architecture, financial auditing and law. How many forensic accountants and auditors have been appointed as part of Mr Orgill’s staff? It is not enough to have a media adviser. Obviously we expected the head of the implementation task force to take a suite of rooms in Canberra, appoint the best forensic auditors in the country and go through, contract by contract, the extraordinary rip-offs, waste and mismanagement that have been features of the minister’s signature tune, being the school hall rip-off program.

We also asked her not whether the chairman of the implementation task force would be able to access the contracts in each of the states other than New South Wales but whether she would provide those contracts to the opposition. In New South Wales the state government, as rancid as it is, provided the contracts to the New South Wales upper house so that the members could examine them themselves and work out whether the taxpayers had received value for money. We asked the minister whether she would provide the opposition with the same contracts from the other states, not whether she would provide them to the implementation task force. So I ask her that again.

The minister entirely avoided answering the question about how many schools had been fitted out with the 100 megabits per second broadband that the Prime Minister and she promised before the 2007 election would go hand in hand with the computers in schools program. We asked her which schools and how many had actually received that hook-up. I think the answer to that is probably none.

In answering a question about the Education Investment Fund, the Minister for Education talked about projects that were being funded by that fund—a fund that, of course, the previous government established. The question I asked the minister was whether the promise the government had made to put an extra $5 billion into the Education Investment Fund was going to
be kept. She completely avoided answering that question and instead talked about the projects that were going to be funded. The question from the opposition was: will the government keep their promise to take the Education Investment Fund to $11 billion—which I note the Leader of the House trumpeted in question time on numerous occasions. I would make the point that what has in fact happened is that the Education Investment Fund has been raided for the pet projects of the Prime Minister and the minister, and not one extra dollar has been put in to reach that $11 billion. I also asked her about the trades training centres. She absolutely did not answer any questions about the trades training centres—(Time expired)

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Portfolio

Proposed expenditure, $829,038

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (6.36 pm)—I wish to take the opportunity to outline the key measures in the budget for the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government portfolio. Upon coming to office we had to deal with a significant infrastructure deficit. Under the previous government, we saw public investment in infrastructure fall by 20 per cent as a share of national income. We know that the former government, over the first eight years after it came into office in 1996, slashed $2 billion from the federal roads budget, and rail fared little better. This budget continues our record investment in the nation’s infrastructure and in our productive and export capacity.

This year, construction work begins on some $20 billion worth of major road and rail projects. This budget also makes provision for the delivery of vital infrastructure reform, such as the establishment of national transport regulators. The highlights in the budget include: $1 billion for interstate rail, bringing our total investment in rail to $9 billion; $70.7 million to get the Moorebank intermodal terminal shovel-ready; $89.9 million over four years for almost 100 extra CASA frontline staff; $200 million for aviation security, including next-generation body scanners, funding for regional airport security and explosives detection dogs; $6 billion for the Regional Infrastructure Fund to invest our resource profits in capacity-building infrastructure and improve our potential to grow in the future; a record $2 billion in 2010-11 for local government; and some $8.5 million for long-term planning of Sydney’s aviation capacity.

In terms of rail, road and port infrastructure, we have committed now through the Nation Building Program some $37 billion over six years. This is a major investment. Projects which will commence construction in 2010 include the Hunter Expressway, the Pacific Highway’s Kempsey bypass and Sapphire to Woolgoolga upgrade, the Cardwell range realignment in North Queensland at the Bruce Highway, the Kings Road interchange at the Calder Freeway, duplication of the Princes Highway from Waurn Ponds to Winchelsea, Dampier Highway duplication stages 2 to 6, the Great Eastern Highway and Roe Highway interchange, and the Hume Highway Holbrook bypass—we brought forward funding in this budget for this to make sure that the full duplication can be completed by the year 2012. Rail projects include: the Wimmera intermodal terminal at Dooen, the main north-south rail capacity improvements, stage 2 of the Port Botany rail line upgrade between Enfield and Port Botany, the Kewdale intermodal rail developments, the Gawler rail line modernisation and the upgrade of the Hobart to Western Junction rail line project. They are all due to commence this year.

MAIN COMMITTEE
There is a total of $312 million for aviation security and safety—importantly, in legislation before this parliament right now, legislation which must be carried in the next fortnight by both houses. There is $89.9 million over four years for almost 100 extra CASA front-line staff—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—I would have thought that this was not the day to make jokes about airline safety. Funding is by an increase in aviation fuel excise from approximately 2.9c to 3.6c per litre, a smaller increase than if CPI were maintained. The Howard government raised the fuel excise 11 times, to keep pace with inflation, in order to fund safety and regulatory activity. All of this funding is going back into extra front-line staff in aviation security for CASA, and I would hope that it has the support of every member of this parliament.

There is $14.5 million to continue the Indonesian transport safety program. This program was begun by the former government. It is an excellent program. It is an important part of our engagement with our region, and we have determined to continue it. The implementation of national regulators, another important program, is a reform which will boost national income by up to $2.4 billion a year. Can I conclude by saying that we have funding for regional and local community infrastructure in addition to the work that we have done already. (Time expired)

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (6.41 pm)—The numbers mentioned by the government are typical of the rhetoric but are a long way from the fact. Indeed some of the numbers being referred to are about expenditure which is not scheduled to happen for more than 10 years. This is typical of the way in which the government try to promote their activities. For instance, in relation to roads the government said on 21 November 2007 that they would complete the duplication of the Pacific Highway by 2016. They are over $3 billion short in funding to deliver that objective. They promised us that there would be work done on the Northern Sydney rail freight corridor—$840 million. That has turned into a $15 million study. What about the Gateway Motorway at Nudgee, a 16-kilometre section from Nudgee Road to Gympie Arterial Road? A study was to be completed by June 2009, but the study has not even been done, let alone the road built. So, much of this is rhetoric rather than fact, and that is typical of the way in which the government have approached their task.

A number of speakers want to speak, so let me raise just a couple of other issues. I would like to refer to Regional Development Australia, which in its short time is already showing signs of failure. Certainly there is a lot of discord and disappointment at local committee level because they have simply got nothing to do. The government’s rhetoric has again failed to be delivered in reality. This was supposed to be a shared partnership arrangement between the Commonwealth and the states, but it is obvious that no state is paying its way. Even though they have been given the opportunity to select committee members, none of the states are contributing much. Some states are contributing nothing at all. In most states a bit of unused office space and a little bit of so-called in-kind support are being provided. This scheme is doing nothing to make a connection between the regions and the Commonwealth. In fact it is using up millions of dollars of administration funds without actually delivering anything to the people of regional Australia. The dialogue is not happening. The committees are being asked to prepare plans. This will be the third set of plans that the regional development committees...
have been asked to prepare since this government was elected. How about some action rather than spending their time just on bureaucratic activity?

The other odd thing of course is the way in which the committees are set up. It is supposed to be a regional development organisation. In Victoria there are nine regional development committees and four of them are in Melbourne. On the other hand, New South Wales has 14 and there is only one in Sydney. So in reality what we have got, essentially, is an organisation that is supposed to be about regions but is in fact mainly about cities. Indeed most of the state offices have been closed by this government, and money has been diverted to a new better cities unit in Sydney. This is where this government’s priorities are in relation to this issue.

One other matter I would like to raise is the question of the funding for security at regional airports. The government has announced $32 million in the budget to assist with security in the airports which are now going to have to provide full screening—the airports of those towns that have the larger, Dash 8, aircraft coming to them. The government said in Senate estimates that there are 19 such airports that will require upgrading. Most of them will need expenditure of $2 million, $3 million, $4 million or $5 million in capital works just to be able to meet the requirements. Then, of course, there are the operational costs as well. So $32 million is only going to go a small part of the way.

I have raised with the minister previously the concerns of towns like Barcaldine and Blackall that have only three services a week. They carry out less than perhaps 50 passengers a week. It is being done in a triangle service with Longreach, and so they have Dash 8 aircraft. These little places are going to have to spend something like $3 million to $5 million on upgrading their terminal buildings. They will need about six staff to be employed for a minimum of four hours every time a plane comes in to land. It has been estimated that the cost of the passengers going out of towns like Blackall and Barcaldine will be at least $1,000 a ticket to provide this security.

I believe in security. We need to do the right things. But it is madness to put these kinds of costs onto small airports like Barcaldine and Blackall. And I ask the government: who is going to fund the balance, beyond the $32 million? The government seems to want to deny these small communities the opportunity to have an air service. This is really bureaucracy gone wild.

**Mr Gray** (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia) (6.46 pm)—I noted that, in his initial observations, the minister spoke of Australia’s infrastructure deficit, and nowhere does this become more apparent than in Northern Australia. I am thinking particularly of the Kimberley region of Northern Australia and specifically the East Kimberley, for which this budget contains substantial spending measures to address infrastructure shortfalls in education and health, in economic infrastructure and, importantly, in community infrastructure.

The $195 million which the government has committed to the East Kimberley will fund, amongst other things, a brand-new swimming pool in Wyndham. The original swimming pool was built in the mid-1960s as part of the celebration of a great result by Australia at the Tokyo Olympics. The then Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, engaged in a rapid program of encouraging communities to develop their own swimming pools. They did that out at Wyndham and they got a great pool. But, unfortunately, it is now 40-odd years old. So this infrastructure package attends to fixing community infrastructure such as that pool.
Importantly, out there in the East Kimberley, where there are 8,000 people, housing shortages and accommodation problems—in particular for Indigenous people but for the broader community as well—are at absolutely critical levels. There is an average of nearly eight people per dwelling in the East Kimberley. That has caused accommodation crises and, in many areas, a lack of not just shelter but also personal security for young families and, in particular, young kids in the East Kimberley. The $195 million that we will expend—much of it through this budget—will build 50 new houses in the Kununurra area itself, and then another 50 new houses in surrounding local communities. Already, 23 of the houses in Kununurra are in the process of construction, with many more out of Wyndham currently in the process of construction.

At the Wyndham hospital—with the great cooperation of the Western Australian state government, the Barnett government, which, as part of its election strategy, determined that it would invest in the development of Ord Stage 2—the Australian government, through Prime Minister Rudd, agreed to provide social and community infrastructure. And so the $195 million mirrors, in many ways, the $220 million which the state government will spend bringing Ord Stage 2 into production.

The cooperation with the state government of Western Australia in developing this agenda has been complete. So the $50 million that will be invested in hospitals and health includes emergency accommodation for patients; accommodation for all medical specialists, nurses and doctors; and, importantly, a massive new renovation of the hospital at Kununurra. As an important part of that there are new renal dialysis facilities but also a greater capacity for that hospital to deal with the increased population in Kununurra.

There is $65 million that will build a brand new high school—but more than simply a new high school. The high school will contain technical training facilities and also teacher training facilities. The need to help train teachers to work in that environment becomes apparent when you live in Perth for any period of time and watch education in northern Western Australia. Through the excellent work of principal Matt Wren and through the support of the Western Australian state government minister, Liz Constable, we will put into that high school a dedicated teacher training facility supported by the state government. Teachers will be accommodated in the housing that I have just mentioned and they will develop teacher-training techniques to help make them better teachers in a tough part of Australia, but in a community that does need the support of our government and the support of the Western Australian government.

When the minister began his conversation about Australia’s infrastructure deficit, he filled it out by discussion of the roads, bridges and rail infrastructure that is needed. When you turn your attention to northern Australia, the deep investment that is required in social and economic infrastructure is apparent to anyone who cares. For too long in the Kimberley and throughout northern Australia we have seen inadequate investment in our communities. They are productive communities that have real futures, and in the East Kimberley they have a future that is linked to a horticulture development that will not only generate jobs for locals, including Indigenous people but also, importantly, generate a whole new future for that region.

It is a wonderful thing to look at from my perspective as a parliamentary secretary—(Time expired)
Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (6.51 pm)—I rise to participate in these estimates by asking some questions, if I may. Today at question time I noted that the minister referred to the undesirability of B-double traffic being mixed with suburban traffic. This is a feature that we see in my electorate every day on Pennant Hills Road, the link between the F3 and the M2.

I note that last year $150 million was appropriated for design work in relation to that road to ensure that it would be, presumably at some point in time, shovel ready in relation to the procedures that may enable a project to be considered for funding. I ask: has that money been spent? There is no appearance that I have seen of any spending of those funds. And if it has not, is the funding still there? What is the program for participating in activities that will bring this project to a point where it can be considered on its merits? In my view it is the most urgently needed improvement to infrastructure involving travel between Melbourne and Brisbane.

The other matter that I want to refer to is that I had some discussions about the noise made by very large transport vehicles, and I am told that there were measures to involve noise abatement that had to be considered at a transport ministers conference, presumably, where agreement is to be forthcoming about measures that will ensure the noise emanating from these vehicles is addressed. I would ask: what progress is being made on that? It has been suggested to me that something that was supposed to have occurred, perhaps even this year or earlier, is now being put back. If that is the case I think it would be undesirable, but I would appreciate some advice from you, Minister, as to the progress that is being made in relation to that matter as well.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (6.53 pm)—I rise to speak in particular detail about the infrastructure provisions within the federal budget. To set the scene with regard to that, the Geelong community has gone through substantial growth over the last three decades and a large part of that growth within the broader Geelong community has taken place within my federal seat of Corangamite.

At the 2007 election the Rudd opposition, as it was then, developed a very strong comprehensive infrastructure plan for my community and for that of south-west Victoria. In contrast, the then Howard government had no developed plans and no priorities for infrastructure within our region. When we talk about infrastructure throughout our region, we are talking about roads such as the Geelong Ring Road and the duplication of the Princes Highway, and we are talking about the very substantial rail infrastructure that we do have in our region and the need to develop and broaden that even further. We have now come to government and started the process of delivering the structure that we committed to in 2007.

The Geelong community had a very clear choice at the 2007 election in terms of infrastructure and they have an even clearer choice in the election that will take place later this year. We have a substantial investment plan, a plan that will deliver real structure and real benefits for regional Australia, particularly the greater community of Geelong. It is an integrated plan, a plan that will deliver real benefits not only to Geelong but also to the whole of south-west Victoria. On the other hand, we see a coalition with no infrastructure plan, no plan whatsoever to build our nation and build regional communities like mine in Geelong. The opposition are antiprivate-sector investment. They are antibusiness. They are anti-environment. They have no plan for health. They have no plan for schools. They have no plan for skills within my region.
I watched the Treasurer deliver his budget speech and of course one of the key aspects of his speech was the importance of infrastructure and the important role that the government can play in the delivery of infrastructure. I then thought that perhaps the coalition and Tony Abbott might deliver a speech in reply the following Thursday night that might have a plan for this nation. So I sat back and I listened, and infrastructure was not mentioned. I then thought that perhaps the shadow Treasurer might have an infrastructure plan, that perhaps he would deliver that in his speech the following week at the Press Club. Of course there was no plan. There was no talk about infrastructure. I then thought maybe the shadow finance minister might talk about infrastructure. He did talk about infrastructure and he did highlight that they would not support any infrastructure in my region. The Geelong ring road will not go ahead under a coalition government. The duplication of the Princes Highway will not go ahead. Then, of course, they tried to cover up their mistakes and their lack of a plan by deceit. Through the *Geelong Advertiser* and the *Colac Herald* they attempted to mislead by indicating that they were going to fund infrastructure through cutting the Roads to Recovery program. The Roads to Recovery program is very, very important for delivering local infrastructure in communities and local roads. I ask the minister to respond. (Time expired)

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (6.58 pm)—I wish to respond to three issues that have been raised by members during this debate. Firstly, the Leader of the National Party. I was surprised that he actually raised the Pacific Highway. The fact is we are committing $3.1 billion over six years. The former government spent $1.3 billion over 12 years. Right now, in terms of construction commencing or construction that has already commenced, there is the Banora Point upgrade, the Ballina bypass, the Glenugie upgrade, the Kempsey bypass, the Woolgoolga to Arrawarra section and the Bulahdelah bypass. Over 1,000 people right now are working on the Pacific Highway. Had the Howard government kept up their proportion over the period compared with the New South Wales government’s contribution, that duplication would now be close to completion. The member for Page and I met with the Pacific Highway taskforce and all the mayors along that highway, and they all congratulated the government on the work we are doing.

In relation to aviation security, I say to the Leader of the Nationals: this should not be a partisan issue. Our regional airports need upgrading, and we are providing the capital funding to make sure that occurs. Frankly, to come in here and just make up a figure in order to have a scare campaign is irresponsible. We know that aviation security and safety is the No. 1 priority identified by the aviation white paper. The government is committed to pursuing these reforms. We have sat down with industry and the airports and worked through these changes.

Secondly, in terms of the questions from the member for Berowra, I can confirm to the member that we have allocated $150 million. It is in the Nation Building Program. The memorandum of understanding has been signed with the state government and we remain committed to that funding. The New South Wales government needs to determine its position as to whether it will proceed with this project but we have ensured that the funding has been quarantined, and I will continue to do so. I think the F3 to the M2 is an important project. It is unfortunate that this is the first lot of Commonwealth funding allocated to this project. Over the previous 12 years they did not get it; under our government $150 million has been allocated in the Nation Building Program. That is why consistency of funding for infrastructure is
vital and that is why I would caution the coalition against making commitments against this spending. We are committed to the integrity of that process, and that should be maintained.

Turning now to the noise abatement issue that the member raised, I would expect that that these discussions perhaps would have taken place at Austroads, which essentially is a committee made up of the RTA in New South Wales and its road transport equivalents around the country. They are responsible for research and for standards. This has not been an agenda item at the Australian Transport Council ministerial meetings that I chair, and I am advised that that was also the case under the former government. So Austroads is where the discussion would have taken place.

With regard to the questions from the member for Corangamite, construction is underway on the Geelong Ring Road stage 4A. Detailed planning is underway on stage 4B, which is scheduled to start in the 2010-11 financial year. Construction on the long awaited duplication of the Princes Highway between Waurn Ponds and Winchelsea will commence this year. In partnership with the state government, we are delivering roadworks worth some $435 million for the people living in this region of Victoria, including, of course, Roads to Recovery funding which this government is committed to and the opposition has threatened. (Time expired)

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (7.03 pm)—I too would like to pursue some questions of the minister and seek his assistance on interpreting the budget documents. It is a little difficult for listeners out there to believe the commitments that are being made, and being repeated here in this session, when commitments made in the past have not been honoured. I refer specifically to a project entirely contained in the federal division of Mallee—that is, the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline. Before the minister responds and says that I should be asking this question of another portfolio, I would remind him that at the 2007 election, in particular on 19 November 2007, in a shadow ministerial statement, he said:

A Rudd Labor government will provide $124 million further investment in the Wimmera Mallee pipeline project.

Subsequently we have seen only $99 million of that. My constituents are asking me to ask the minister when they might see the balance, the $25 million that is still outstanding. I remind the minister that the recent Victorian state government budget allocated $25 million, in receipt from the Commonwealth. So they are expecting it as revenue and there are still quite a lot of unfinished infrastructure needs in the project, like the backfilling of huge supply channels and the replacement of culverts under roads. There is a huge challenge confronting local councils. There are nine of them, all now confronted with huge bills—given the minister’s portfolio interest—for fire services. These are fire services that they have been forced to replace. It is not just something that they have to invest in and therefore it is a state responsibility; it is something they have had to change because the supply system is different.

In answer to a question on notice, the Prime Minister responded to me on 13 May 2009 and changed the wording of the media release to say ‘up to $124 million’. What I want to know from the minister today is when he will honour the commitment he made in 2007. The member for Ballarat, who is present in the chamber, would know that the commitment to fund that vital water infrastructure project was very much a feature of the 2007 election campaign in western Victoria. The integrity of the minister at the table is at stake here. He said it would be delivered and it has not been. I am expecting him to respond and advise me where it is in these budget papers, whether it is in his portfolio or someone else’s, because I cannot find it.
The constituents who rely on this project now as the only water supply for the whole of the north-west corner of Victoria are expecting a constructive answer from the minister as to when the balance of $25 million is going to be made available to the Victorian government. It has become a matter of urgency. The fire service has been installed and the water authority is carrying the funding for that. It is a contingent liability for all those municipalities. The backfilling of the channels is becoming an enormous task and so is the building of the culverts under roadways. These are all issues relating to the minister’s portfolio, and I am seeking his assistance to address my question. When will we see the balance of $25 million for the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline?

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (7.07 pm)—I have a number of questions to ask the minister. But, firstly, I would like to say that the seat of Kingston is in the outer metropolitan suburbs of Adelaide. So I was very pleased, after being elected and after lobbying very hard for the rail extension from Noarlunga to Seaford, that it was this government that funded that rail extension. The people in the southern suburbs of Adelaide have been waiting for over 30 years for this rail extension. The corridor has existed for 30 years and there has been community campaigning on this rail extension for many years.

The southern suburbs of Adelaide have been growing at an enormous pace. There are lots of new suburbs—places like Seaford Meadows and Seaford Rise—but the infrastructure over the last 10 to 20 years has not kept up with that. This was something that the residents very much wanted to know about. So it was very pleasing that it took the election of a Rudd Labor government to commit $291 million to extend the rail line. This has been welcomed because it is very much needed. Residents need to be able to get around. It takes approximately 45 minutes, sometimes longer in peak hour traffic, to get to the CBD. On this new rail line, which will be electrified—which will be a first in Adelaide, because our train lines in the metropolitan area are not electrified—people will be able to easily get into the city. Not only will it ease urban congestion caused by cars on the road; it will also go a long way to making it more affordable for people to go out and buy their first house. A lot of the people moving out to these suburbs are first home buyers and they do need the ease of affordable living on an ongoing basis. This rail line will certainly provide that.

On a trivial note, but something that the people of Kingston are very excited about, the rail bridge that is part of the rail extension will be 0.1 kilometres longer than the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It is some source of pride for the people of Kingston that they will have a very long bridge.

In addition, there has been a lot of talk about road funding, and certainly I know that the people of Kingston have welcomed significant investment from this government in road funding. One of the big projects that was committed to while we were in opposition was the Main South Road-Seaford Road-Victor Harbour Road intersection. I was very pleased to go up this weekend and see the lights installed at that intersection, as we are improving the movement of traffic. This is a very popular route for getting up to McLaren Vale that this government promised in opposition and is delivering in government. I was also very pleased that we did not just commit to road funding while we were in opposition; we continue to commit to road funding. I was very, very pleased to join with the Prime Minister in March to announce funding to improve a very dangerous intersection—the Main South Road-Victor Harbour intersection. So we are seeing really significant funding from this government.
It is disappointing that the previous government did not invest in infrastructure in Kingston. I think that is a real black mark against the previous government. While the suburbs were growing, the previous government did nothing. But what is more concerning to the people of Kingston, and certainly to me as the local member, is whether the rail extension from Noarlunga to Seaford is under threat. We know—as the previous speaker, the member for Corangamite, mentioned—that the opposition are very unclear about what projects they will continue and what projects will be under threat. While this government is getting on with the job and actually delivering projects, I am not sure—and the residents in my electorate are not sure—whether or not the rail extension to Seaford or in fact the Victor Harbour Road safety upgrade will be one of those discontinued items. Is there an asterisk next to these projects that means that they will be discontinued? The people in Kingston spent 12 years under the previous government not getting infrastructure. They are now starting to see infrastructure being delivered on the ground. I ask the minister to update us further on some of these infrastructure spends.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (7.12 pm)—I will be very brief, Minister. We have a place called the Millaa Millaa intersection in Far North Queensland, in the Atherton Tableland. We have had five deaths there in two months. It is very, very serious indeed. Even though we have now been going back and forth to the state officials for a considerable period of time, there has been no action. There have been five deaths in two months, and I think there have been 10 deaths over the past 18 months—but I would not be quoted on the second figure. Nearby, not far away at Tolga, there is another intersection which has been brought to attention by Peter Griffiths—at the Humpy there—which is extremely dangerous. People will be killed; there is no doubt about that. Regarding the widening of the agricultural access roads throughout the tablelands, Rose Sutton has done a lot of very good work on that. Once again, no work has been taking place, and someone is—or some people are—going to get killed there. There are two places—at Majors Creek, where the road comes into the Charters Towers-Townsville highway, and at the Kurrimine-Silkwood intersection with the main coastal highway—which need converging lanes as opposed to the current T-junctions or right-angle intersections.

A bigger and more strategic development is the Gulf Country of Australia, which, if you include the north-west minerals province, is the richest part of the country. It has most of Australia’s rainfall runoff and most of Australia’s water. It is rolling blacksoil plains, 400 or 500 kilometres wide and 1,000 kilometres in depth. It has mineral resources stretching from Georgetown right across to Mount Isa. But we cannot get into or out of that gulf or lower peninsula area—and I am pleased that the member for Leichhardt is here, because he is well aware of the problem—except if we were to come back down through Cairns, which is a disaster, and we are not allowed to do it anyway. We are not allowed to use the railway line and we are not allowed to cart cattle or mineral product down through Cairns at the moment.

How the hell do we get out? I will tell you how we get out. We have a port that is falling to pieces at Karumba—the concrete has almost completely gone; it is ceasing to exist as a port at the moment—or we go via Charters Towers, which is 500 kilometres from this area. That would mean carting ore, trying to get out through Townsville on a highway that is 50 years old, single-lane and built up. If you have an oncoming truck carrying ore or cattle and you are a caravan going north, God help you. You have an eight-foot-four on the left-hand side of the
road, if you leave the road. We just had some 60 cattle, I am told, in a truck roll over on the weekend, again on this highway.

During the last wet season, we were completely cut off from the coastal highway—and I know you are well aware of that, Minister Albanese. No matter how much money we spend on it, we cannot make it all-weather. We appreciate the work of this government and the previous government in upgrading that highway, but we need the alternative route to get our product. All of Australia’s bananas are grown up there. More than half of Australia’s mangoes are grown up there. We lost $3 million—arguably $5 million—because we simply could not get out of North Queensland during the last wet season. The alternative route was not serviceable for the sort of product that we needed to get out. So that highway desperately needs to be upgraded, as does the port of Karumba. And we are not talking in either case about big money.

The government have done a wonderful job—and I pay them full tribute—on the North Australia clean energy corridor. They have given us reality so that we have been able to go to people. I understand that two major companies now have outlaid $20 million on building this transmission line. But we would never have got that far without the intervention of the government. I want to put on record my sincere appreciation. Along that corridor are a number of clean energy projects, but we desperately need a continued commitment from the government.

Finally, we have four low-level projects. We ask—and I have discussed this with you, Minister Albanese—to fast-track or more realistically accomplish a regional development program through moderate water utilisation projects at Richmond, Georgetown, Cloncurry and Normanton. That is an estimated 200 jobs per town, 7,000 hectares per town and an extra $100 million a year for the Australian economy. We do not really need money; we simply need an expedition by way of submission to the federal cabinet. We very much appreciate your help to date on both those projects, Minister, and we very much appreciate it in the immediate future.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (7.17 pm)—The member for Kennedy has raised a number of issues. He raised issues of particular intersections in Queensland. I am, of course, not familiar with every intersection around the country but I can inform him that in Queensland we have increased our spending on road and rail by 126 per cent. That is a total investment of $8.7 billion over six years under the Nation Building Program. We have also, through local government, funded $71.2 million for local roads through the Roads to Recovery program. As part of the economic stimulus we targeted black spots—such as the ones that the member for Kennedy raised—by having a significant increase in the Black Spot Program. In Queensland, that is $12.1 million targeting 38 dangerous spots on local roads. In addition, the member’s electorate will benefit from the $4.5 million we are spending on the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity package in Queensland this year on roadside facilities, rest stops, parking bays and decoupling areas. It is the first time there has been a designated program for that, just as it is the first time there has been a designated program for level rail crossings—$150 million of the economic stimulus nationally dedicated to that. I certainly would be happy to receive representations from the member for Kennedy about the specific intersections that he raised and to get an ascertained response for him on that.
With regard to the Gulf Country, as the member for Kennedy knows, I had the pleasure of his company in Normanton and Karumba earlier this year. As regional development minister I have gone about this country, regardless of the political affiliation of electorates and, as you would be aware, Member for Kennedy, I have been to your seat a number of times. I was there to open the airport at Karumba. There is, undoubtedly, a great deal of potential in Northern Australia. There is also, undoubtedly, a great infrastructure deficit there. I met with one of his mayors today, who told me that the Einasleigh River Bridge project, a project championed by the member for Kennedy and taken up through the Regional Local Community Infrastructure Program, is underway and progressing extremely well. This particular road bridge is why the isolation of Normanton, Karumba and the Gulf Country occurred as a result of the flooding that occurred in Far North Queensland. The buck had been passed between levels of government but the issue had not been addressed. Labor addressed it through the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. Indeed, it received the second highest grant under the first round of strategic projects.

With regard to the clean energy corridor, I can inform the member for Kennedy that, during the last sitting fortnight, I met again with the businesses and local government areas concerned. We also had a very successful meeting here in Parliament House where businesspeople, as well as local representatives, were hosted by the member for Kennedy. The Treasurer, the Minister for Resources and Energy and I attended. This program has a great deal of potential. One reason why we are committed to the regional infrastructure fund is that there is potential. If the infrastructure investment is got right, it will achieve much greater returns in increased productivity and increased export performances. We have no doubt that the economy has been held back by those issues.

With regard to the Noarlunga to Seaford rail line, I was also pleased to be with the member for Kingston for the launch. This is a much-needed project, as have been the road upgrades in the southern outskirts of Adelaide. This is a growing community and it requires this infrastructure.

Mr Forrest interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—(Extension of time granted) With respect to the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline, which has been raised by the member for Mallee, I will endeavour to obtain an answer. Obviously, that particular project is not within this portfolio and therefore is not the subject of these estimates. But I will endeavour to receive an answer. With respect to the delivery of local projects I have engaged directly with the member for Mallee on issues in his electorate. He has raised this matter with me and I will obtain an answer for him as appropriate.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (7.23 pm)—I acknowledge the fact that the minister has been to my electorate on a number of occasions. He will be quite familiar with some of the issues that I want to raise. The first issue is the Warrego Highway, for which you as a government committed some $55 million in this round of AusLink. The first tranche of that is about to be constructed. I am not quite sure how long, but it seems to me that, in dealing with Main Roads in Queensland, some of these processes seem to be truncated and very frustrating. But Amby Corner is the first tranche to be rolled out. I would be interested to know whether there is sufficient money in that to also deal with the bridge at Mitchell on the Warrego Highway. There is also a commitment to passing lanes east of Dalby. There is increased traffic, particularly carrying grain and coal along there. The coal goes to power stations in the
east. The traffic is enormous—traffic that used to be carried on rail. It is now on the Warrrego Highway and it is causing enormous problems for the day-to-day traffic, notwithstanding the increased traffic as a result of the coal seam methane development.

The other highway I was interested in was the Landsborough Highway. A large part of it goes through the member for Kennedy’s electorate, and the electorate currently of the member for Flynn, which will be part of a redistribution into Maranoa. I would be interested to know whether you have had any contact with Minister Wallace in Queensland. I understand that there is a road alliance group based at Longreach and the minister has committed some $70 million to road projects in that region. I think the deal he is trying to strike with you is whether you have $70 million to put on the table as a matching grant for roads in central western Queensland.

A particular point I would like to raise as well is the bridge over the Barcoo. It is on the Landsborough Highway and is the major arterial route to Darwin and back down to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. It is in dire straits. It desperately needs money. I think it cannot wait for any other program. It desperately needs rebuilding. I will be interested in your comment in relation to the Barcoo bridge.

The other one is the enormous amount of flood damage that has occurred in my electorate. I understand from the main roads office that there is some $100 million worth of road mitigation work that has to happen as a result of that massive flooding in western Queensland. A lot of these roads have only been patched up and are still in dire need of that flood damage money. I will be interested to know whether you have had any contact with the minister in Queensland and whether that $100 million will soon be available to go towards the repair of those highways as well as the outback roads as a result of the damage that has occurred during the flooding in western Queensland.

Finally, another one that I sent you a note about the other day which is making national headlines is the Birdsville Track, which was subject to massive flooding earlier in the year.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

Mr BRUCE SCOTT—It is a very big issue for the people of the outback. You would know, having attended the Birdsville races last year, how many people will come along that road. Minister, the other thing is that it is the main arterial route that brings supplies into Birdsville. They come from Adelaide and there is no alternative but to come up the Birdsville Track. The problem at the moment is the punt that goes across the Cooper Creek and that has not been used for 20 years. It can take two or three cars at a time. I will be interested to hear whether you have been speaking with the minister in South Australia responsible for this part of the road infrastructure. It does need your attention, I have to say, because it is going to cut that road for the next six months. It is a strategic road. It is a main supply route for food, and other supplies, as you would know, to make its way along the Birdsville Track. Outback tourism is a big issue for Australians and I would appreciate your comments. (Time expired)

Mr TREVOR (Flynn) (7.28 pm)—Minister, I have some questions relating to my electorate of Flynn. You are well aware of the electorate of Flynn in Central Queensland and you have visited many times. You have made many important announcements for Flynn, too numerous to mention here. They have been well received. As I speak, many great projects are on the drawing board, are underway or have been completed. The people of Flynn appreciate
your support and that of the Rudd Labor government. But, Minister, I have a deep and ongo-
ing concern for two projects in my electorate of Flynn. I have worked hard with my govern-
ment to deliver both of these. I refer specifically to the Calliope crossroads upgrade near my
home town of Gladstone and the Gin Gin southern approach upgrade to the south of Glad-
stone. Both, as you know, are very dangerous intersections. The Rudd Labor government has
committed to both after many years of inaction by the previous government. Minister, are
there any threats to these two projects?

In addition, Minister, Roads to Recovery funding plays a vital role in my electorate of
Flynn. Millions of dollars are provided to local governments to assist with their local roads,
and I suspect that my 13 local councils would like to know from you, Minister, whether there
are any threats to this funding—funding which they rely on so heavily for the proper mainte-
nance and upkeep of their local roads. Minister, if you could answer these questions for me
and my electorate of Flynn and the people who reside within it, I would appreciate it.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (7.30 pm)—I have six issues, and I am happy to have some
taken on notice and for you to respond where you can, Minister. The first is the RDA and the
resourcing of the RDA structure into the future. It is going to become a critical issue for deliv-
ery of programs in our area going forward as we transition from being a priority employment
area. It is a great advocacy and lobby structure that is being built. For it to be more than that,
though, there needs to be a recognised resourcing base that goes with it. So anything you can
give with regard to the funding or resourcing of RDAs would be welcome.

I thought I heard you mention earlier that there is funding attached to the regional infra-
structure program, and I would be interested in the ongoing and recurrent funding of the local
infrastructure program. That was, over the last 18 months, an excellent program for local
communities such as mine on the mid-North Coast. It did make a big difference. Small area
labour market figures today have us at record unemployment levels, and that can be partly
attributed to the local infrastructure program. I am worried that it is getting lost as we come
out of stimulus mode. I would hope that that is an ongoing program. So anything you can give
on that front would be appreciated.

The issue for local government, particularly in New South Wales, where we are rate
pegged, is infrastructure backlog. I have to mention again the Greater Taree City Council,
which has had the old New South Wales Treasury fellow go through. I cannot remember his
name.

Mr Albanese—Percy Allen.

Mr OAKESHOTT—Thank you; yes, Percy Allen. We have $100 million of infrastructure
backlog in one council alone, particularly with respect to timber bridges. The member for
Page, who was just in the chair, has a similar concern with respect to Kyogle council. For the
North Coast, the land of valleys and hills, on the timber bridge issue we are seeing a lot of
failures happen at the same time. We have high growth and a low rate basis, and this issue is
just getting pushed onto local government. I have asked before about a Commonwealth timber
bridge program of some sort. If it is only in areas where there is high growth and there is a
low rate base, that would be something for consideration and advice.

I heard the Pacific Highway issue mentioned. I cannot let it slip by. I have lived through a
2006 commitment date from Paul Keating and John Fahey—standing up at the Tweed holding
hands. I have even lived through 1999 as a commitment date and 2010 and now 2016. I would love to hear that firmly locked in. If so, there is going to have to be an increase of funding in the next couple of years to finish the job. The 50 to 60 per cent that is done is fantastic and welcomed. It is making what is left more dangerous, and that does need to be sped up.

There is the issue of aviation at the three airports in the Lyne electorate. We are getting them working together. We are getting general aviation pushed to the smaller disused airports, which is great. The RPTs going into Port Macquarie, in particular, are creating increased pressure. I know that an application that has been put before the department with regard to regional aviation, I would ask for some advice on future direction not only with respect to Commonwealth input into infrastructure at regional airports but also more generally with respect to airport infrastructure in regions throughout Australia. That is it. Thank you.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government) (7.34 pm)—In the short time I have: the member for Maranoa has raised the issue of the Warrego Highway. We have been busy talking to our Queensland counterparts to make sure that the $54 million funding we have committed is spent as an immediate priority. He raised a number of other issues, and I am pleased to say that the member for Maranoa is very genuine about the issues which he raises. With regard to the Birdsville Track, the Attorney-General’s office has contacted the minister responsible in South Australia on the issue of the Birdsville Track punt. Under current arrangements, it is up to the South Australian government to ask the federal government for assistance in natural disasters such as flooding.

The member for Flynn raised the issue of the commitment that we have to Gin Gin and the upgrade of the southern approaches. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition went to the member for Flynn’s electorate last week and could not confirm the $20 million funding for that vital project. Nor could he confirm the funding for the Calliope crossroads—the $55 million that we have allocated to get stage 1 underway. I am very concerned with both the issues that he raised and the issues that the member for Lyne raised about Roads to Recovery funding. These untied grants for local roads are vital for local government, and they are under threat from the coalition. There was a great deal of concern raised by local government today at the Australian Local Government Association conference about those issues. I am pleased to be able to engage with local members about their specific projects on an ongoing basis.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Health and Ageing Portfolio

Proposed expenditure, $7,164,888,000

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (7.36 pm)—My question to the minister is: given that the Strathpine GP Super Clinic is not an area of workforce shortage, can the minister explain why overseas-trained doctors practising there have been granted exemptions under the Health Insurance Act to be able to work in Strathpine?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.37 pm)—I am happy to take all the questions. It is interesting that we can spend over $7 billion and the shadow minister does not actually have a question about the budget, but no doubt he will be coming to that.

The same rules apply to any applicants for area of workforce shortage and district of workforce shortage.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Mr Dutton interjecting—

Ms ROXON—If the shadow minister wants an answer, he will have to allow me to say more than three words to provide him with the answer—despite this not being a question about the budget, which he obviously does not have any questions about. The same rules apply. There are a complex range of provisions that can apply at different times, because areas move in and out of shortage. There are arrangements that apply in some instances for people who carry them over from previous arrangements. There are no special arrangements that have been put in place for superclinics. I am happy to get the detail of any particular people, without breaching privacy requirements that might be in place for any area where you think something untoward has happened, but I can absolutely assure the member that the rules that apply across the country are the same rules that apply for superclinics.

The advantage, if you like, that is given to a superclinic is about the provision of infrastructure money, which is of course what our superclinics program is about. That has been provided for Strathpine, and it has been a very successful investment. Not only has it come online much quicker than was expected but it has been providing a range of services that have not been available in the member’s electorate beforehand—particularly, for example, for services provided on Sundays and thousands of people taking advantage of the after-hours consultations. But I can assure him that there is no decision from the government and there is no direction from the government that any different rules apply. There are, however, some idiosyncrasies from the program that have applied in many different areas which are to do with areas moving in and out of workforce shortage and continuations of benefits that might have been provided in particular circumstances. I am happy to undertake to find out if any of those arrangements apply at the Strathpine GP Super Clinic.

Mr HALE (Solomon) (7.39 pm)—My question concerns the 2010-11 Commonwealth budget and is about the Rudd government’s $355 million commitment to expand the successful GP superclinic program. The minister would be aware that on two occasions she has visited the GP superclinic site in Palmerston: the first to turn the first sod and the second to inspect works. I am pleased to inform the House and the minister that the work is steaming ahead and we look forward to the opening of the clinic in the coming months. The minister would also be aware that since December 2008 residents in Palmerston have been able to receive after-hours care from this facility. This means that many people do not need to make the trip into Royal Darwin Hospital, which is good for the Palmerston community. Some 30 people a night have presented at the clinic and I think only about 10 per cent have had to be referred on. It is a significant number of people who have not had to go into Royal Darwin Hospital. My question to the minister is, and she is aware of my strong support for this program: can she outline why the government will invest a further $355 million to this program and are there any obstacles in the way of seeing this program delivered to communities across Australia and, in particular, in the Northern Territory in my seat of Solomon?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.41 pm)—I can briefly answer that question. I am conscious that there are a lot of people who want to ask questions and we will turn through them as quickly as we can to make sure that we answer as many as possible. Yes, of course, I am aware of the superclinic that is being built in Palmerston and the after-hours services that are being provided. I am very aware from representations both from the member for Solomon and from the member for Lingiari, who was here, that there is inter-
est in a further expansion of both GP superclinics and other primary care facilities within the Northern Territory. Of course, the Northern Territory has benefited significantly from our investments in health reform with more than $100 million being invested in the Territory. In particular, one of the highlights is nearly $30 million which is going to the first ever medical school in the Northern Territory.

We have included in this budget an item that the opposition to date has not asked questions about and that is an extra $355 million into expanding the GP superclinics program, but also providing infrastructure support for more than 400 GP clinics across the country. We know that there is a need for more of the large ambulatory care facilities that many superclinics are going to be able to provide. There is also a need for good solid general practice providers who want to expand their services—maybe with a practice nurse or a dietitian or a podiatrist—or want to be able to take more GP registrars, for example. Often they cannot do that without expanding their physical infrastructure. So grants of up to half a million dollars are going to be available for these projects on a competitive basis. We are no doubt going to receive those sorts of applications from the Northern Territory. They will be available for Aboriginal medical services and community health providers as well. It is a good opportunity for those services that want to expand and have the capacity to expand, and might want to train more health professionals, to be able to seize that opportunity.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (7.43 pm)—I refer to a previous question to the minister. Given that other Strathpine practices within a stone’s throw of the GP superclinic have sought to employ overseas-trained doctors and have exemptions to do so, but have had those applications rejected—these are practices within the same catchment area, within the same geographical definition, if you like—how can the minister maintain that special treatment has not been conferred on the GP superclinic at Strathpine?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Does the minister want to answer one by one?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.43 pm)—I am quite happy to. My answer is exactly the same as the answer that I have already given, which is that there are not special conditions or requirements or standards that apply for the GP superclinics. I have already undertaken to investigate whether there is anything that makes an unusual situation, such as the continuation of entitlements from some other site, of which there are some idiosyncrasies. There has not been a change of policy since we have been in government in the way the district of workforce shortages works for overseas-trained doctors. Any of the rules that apply are the rules that applied under the government that the member was part of. I do think, however, that this is really grasping at straws about a service which is fundamentally welcomed by the community in the member’s electorate, which to date he has totally ignored for political reasons. It is really taking this to a ridiculous extent quite apart from the fact that this is not the result of a budget measure. It is clear that the opposition does not have any questions about the budget.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (7.44 pm)—This is an opportunity to reaffirm some discussions that have already been had and also to put some views, particularly on the health reform process. I would like some feedback on the post-COAG changes to the pre-COAG organisational chart. In particular, New South Wales has concerns with regard to the state funding pool and how that is going to work in the distribution of funds to high-growth regions, which tradition-
ally have copped the brunt of state funding authorities delivering inequity through their re-
source distribution formulas.

There is a great deal of concern in the regions about this new state funding pool—how much discretion it will have and whether the Commonwealth is going to tie its hands in deliv-
ering equity and fairness for all. As well, in the structure and the delivery of the health reform agenda there is concern in the community sector about where they sit in the funding streams that come down. My understanding is that the health and hospital structure has its own fund-
ing, the primary healthcare structure has its own funding and aged care will at the moment sit separately. But I am unclear on where the community sector sits—the whole range, from Meals on Wheels and the like. There is nervousness in New South Wales about where they will sit in the new health reform. If you can give any information on that front it would be fantastic.

As well, this is an opportunity at a local level to reaffirm issues around boundaries. I spoke to the New South Wales health minister last week about the Manning network wanting to sit with the Hunter network and Port Macquarie, Kempsey and Wauchope wanting very much to sit together. That was put to the Prime Minister in his meeting with clinicians when commu-
nity cabinet met in August last year.

There is also the issue of capital catch-up in the health reform agenda. I hope a substantial number of beds flow either directly from the Commonwealth or through the states through various COAG agreements. This is a direct pitch, once again, for Port Macquarie Base Hospi-
tal for at least a 20-bed catch-up. We have had a horrible history of being out of the network and all the national controversy of being the only privately funded public hospital, then getting brought back, a master plan being done and for five years not much being done around that master plan. With a catch-up in a high-growth region everyone is under pressure. There has been a direct request for beds. Everyone has been as creative as they can be in clinical delivery, but we cannot get past the issue of needing an increase in the number of beds. Hope-
fully that will happen in the short term.

There is also the longer term issue around the networking arrangements of the hospitals in the local area and where acute and subacute sit. Already work is being done between the Commonwealth and the states with regard to the geriatric unit, and any timetables on that would be welcome. Whilst it is not really yours, at a state level information about timetables for the palliative care subacute beds to be moved across to Wauchope hospital as part of the network would be welcome as well.

The issue of GP superclinics has been thrown around. We have submissions in with you on that front as well. We are one area that would certainly welcome one, particularly from the division of GPs—without showing favouritism. I mention that particularly because it has a training element attached to it.

That is a nice segue into an issue I have raised before, the silo thinking of governments. The space that is happening in education in the post-Bradley environment and for us in re-
gional delivery of health care is really exciting. We are seeing more and more universities go regional, particularly into low-SES areas. The delivery of health care and its connection to universities and training is a very successful model. In our area it is the University of Newcas-
tle and the University of New South Wales. They have been in that space before but are now
looking to expand. This is really a pitch to say that if health and education can make this bigger than it already is that would be fantastic for regional areas such as mine.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (7.50 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Ageing. Minister, as you are very much aware, the Shortland electorate is one of the oldest electorates in the country. It is actually the 11th oldest electorate in Australia. My question concerns the 2010-11 Commonwealth budget and the Rudd government’s $7.3 billion investment in our health and hospital system—something that is very important to older Australians. After 12 years of neglect and underinvestment by the federal Liberal and National parties, can you outline to the House what the health reforms mean for our older Australians and the aged-care sector. In particular, could you outline what specific funding has been allocated to aged care. I must say that I have been to many of these sessions where we look at health, ageing and employment. Under the Howard government we were lucky to get the most junior parliamentary secretary here. Tonight we have got three ministers and a parliamentary secretary. I would like to congratulate the executive on that. Minister, I am very keen to hear your answer.

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Minister for Ageing) (7.51 pm)—I thank the member for Shortland. Indeed, the reforms in the 2010-11 budget build on our major commitment to deliver a lot more services for our older Australians. My answer will touch on some of the issues the member for Lyne brought up about providing better health, hospital and aged-care services for our older Australians.

We will be investing more $900 million over the next four years to deliver a national aged-care system. The federal government will be taking full funding and policy responsibility for aged care. We recognise how important that is for service delivery. Part of that will be taking responsibility for home and community care, which as you know is currently delivered by the states. This is so we can provide a seamless system for older people so that they can get the care they need at the right time—whether it is some home modifications or right through to high-level residential care.

We are also committing more than $36 million to establish one-stop shops to provide information to people. We know how difficult it is for people to access aged-care information and services, so this will provide one point of reference where they can find this information. This is all about providing more services for our older Australians.

In this budget we have also committed to providing more aged-care places through $300 million in zero-interest loans to support the development of 2½ thousand places. This builds on our earlier investment in zero-interest loans, which saw quite a large level of interest, as capital assistance to have more aged-care places built. Also, there are 1,200 consumer directed care packages for aged care, which places people right at the centre for their care needs, which is vitally important.

There is also $122 million for more than 280 sub-acute beds in MPSs and over $10 million to boost rural and remote community care providers. There is $280 million to support longer-stay older patients in our public hospitals. As part of taking responsibility for aged care we are providing for those people in our public hospitals whilst we are building more aged-care places.

We are also committed to building the aged-care workforce for now and for the future. We recognise how important that is. There is $310 million in funding for more than 30,000 aged-
care training places and scholarships, which are vitally important. We are also committed to providing a clear career path for those people moving through the aged-care sector. These workforce programs will include clinical and graduate placements.

We are also looking to establish teaching nursing homes. That is so important because those teaching nursing homes will combine local knowledge with the resources of many of our universities and nursing homes. We have also got more than $59 million for aged-care education and training incentives payments. In this budget we have also committed to better protections for our care recipients, which is something the Rudd government is really committed to. There is more than $70 million to improve the operation of our complaints investigation scheme. We are also expanding the options for the resolution of complaints and greater protections for accommodation bonds. These are two vitally important areas for increasing the protection of our older Australians.

We are also improving access to care services, with funding of more than $98 million for GPs and flexible funding for Medicare Locals program to provide more services in our aged-care homes as well as $7 million for a benchmarking tool of business advisory services to improve the operation of our aged-care facilities. All of these measures, worth more than $900 million, will go towards providing better services for our older Australians throughout the country. Also in relation to aged care, we have committed to the Productivity Commission looking at the future needs of our aged-care sector and making sure that we address those. This builds on the reforms the Rudd government has had in place since it came into government over the past 2 1/2 years. We have more than 10,000 aged-care places, we have increased our funding by about 30 per cent, we have recently announced all of this—more than $900 million in reforms—and we are committed to the Productivity Commission inquiry to build the aged-care system of the future.

Of course this is all in absolute stark contrast to the previous government. As I said, we have increased our funding by about 30 per cent and funding per resident has increased by about 16 per cent. If we look at the difference in the previous government, if we look at the opposition leader when he was the Minister for Health and Ageing, and compare that then we see that their funding commitment was a lot less. In fact, there would be $730 million less funding for aged care if we continued to have the same level of aged-care funding as it was when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and Ageing. So there is a very stark contrast between what the Rudd government have been doing—our record investment when it comes to funding for aged care—compared to the opposition leader when he was the Minister for Health and Ageing—$730 million less. And we are committed to building an aged-care system of the future.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (7.56 pm)—I have questions for the minister as well as questions for the parliamentary secretary. Minister, the National Health and Hospitals Network agreement states that the final number and boundaries of Local Hospital Networks will be primarily a matter for the states to resolve. It also states that the boundaries will be resolved bilaterally, between the state health ministers and the Commonwealth health minister. Is the minister aware that after this agreement was signed, the South Australian health minister declared that he would be establishing one health service for the metropolitan area, and that this metropolitan health service will cover seven full-service acute hospitals running from Elizabeth to Noarlunga—from the Lyell McEwin Hospital, to the Noarlunga hospital—and is
in fact more centralised than what we currently have? Will the minister agree to have South Australia’s seven major hospitals, including three major referral hospitals, in the one Local Hospital Network? Is the minister also aware that after Tasmania signed the National Health and Hospitals Network agreement, the Tasmanian health minister indicated in early May that her preference was for a single Local Hospital Network for all of Tasmania? Will this be acceptable to the Commonwealth government? Minister, how is this consistent with your claim in the $10 million television ads that these networks will be run locally when it is quite clear that the state governments are not prepared to facilitate truly Local Hospital Networks?

My questions to the parliamentary secretary are on the Organ and Tissue Donation Authority. I ask: when were you advised, and by whom, of the resignation of the chief executive officer of the Organ and Tissue Donation Authority, Karen Murphy? Parliamentary secretary, can you say what advice you were given for the reasons for Ms Murphy’s departure? Did the department raise any concerns with you about the authority’s administration prior to the departure of Ms Murphy? If so, can you detail these concerns and can you provide the dates on which any audits were conducted into the administration of the Organ and Tissue Donation Authority and their findings?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (7.58 pm)—I am going to come back to making sure I can answer the member for Lyne’s question first, and then the member for Boothby’s. We are happy that the member for Lyne has taken a keen interest in how the new national hospitals network will be able to make sure that his part of the country gets its fair share of services. The purpose of moving to activity based funding, of making sure that the money can follow the population, is a positive one which will be of significant benefit to the member for Lyne’s area. I think he is unnecessarily concerned about ‘the state pool’, which I think were his words. What has been agreed as a result of COAG is that the Commonwealth will pay its 60 per cent of funding to individual state funding—essentially holding pools, which is a legitimate phrase to use.

The really good addition that we were able to negotiate, through the COAG arrangements, is that states—so, in the member for Lyne’s instance, New South Wales—will put their hospital funding into that as well, and all of the money that flows to public hospitals for activity will actually come from that funding. So there will be a much more transparent process, which means that money that we are putting in cannot replace money that the state might have previously put in, and there cannot be any allegations about skimming or inappropriate moving around of money. So that is a really big step for transparency, and should give a big boost to local areas’ confidence in getting the appropriate share of money.

You are quite right to raise questions about how the different boundaries will work, and I think this comes to the member for Boothby’s questions as well. It is going to be within the remit of the states to establish the local hospital networks. But we have been very clear about our priorities. It is to be done by agreement. There are two contrasting arrangements. For the Medicare locals, we will be driving the proposed boundaries, but there will still be a negotiation process with the states and territories, and we would expect the same to apply in reverse for the local hospital networks.

So I do not think that the member for Boothby, for example, should be too unnecessarily alarmed that state ministers are expressing preferences. I think in one instance you might be
verballing the minister. But in others it is legitimate for them to be standing up and saying, ‘Our preference is this.’ That will not necessarily meet the requirements of the agreement.

We have until the end of this calendar year to finalise those arrangements, and we would expect that there would be a lot of public input. I imagine that, in the member for Lyne’s area, there will be a lot of very active public input into what would be the appropriate framework to make sure that local communities do have a say and do not feel like they are being controlled by a very distant bureaucracy but, nevertheless, that there is a big enough catchment to mean that you can plan sensibly for the types of hospital services that are needed in any area.

We do not agree with the opposition’s view that you should have an individual board for every hospital. We think that that sets up competition which can often be damaging and unhealthy. But if you make sure that there is a small group of hospitals that are able to plan together, that can indeed work very well.

The member for Lyne also asked about ‘capital catch-up’. Of course, there is always a challenge in these arrangements, because in health and hospitals a lot of historic decisions have been made about where health services are—and predominantly they are in our capital cities, right in the middle of town. I do not think anyone is suggesting that we close those hospitals, and I think there is a lot of support for the specialised services that they provide.

We need to do the flipside, which is to guarantee that there will be new capital investments and enough beds in the areas where there are new populations. I think that the member is aware that the agreements reached at COAG—for extra beds in the subacute area, and for extra support for emergency departments and elective surgery—do mean that we will shortly be able to make announcements about the distribution of some of those beds. In fact, I announced today that some of those beds are being provided at Wollongong Hospital. We expect, in due course, together with our state colleagues, to be able to make more of those announcements.

I think the Minister for Ageing answered some questions about aged care and geriatric issues in particular. We have heard you loud and clear: the seat of Lyne would like a super-clinic. I think the only issue that you really have is if the Liberal Party is elected; they do not believe any more money should go into these programs.

I am very interested in the ideas that you raise about the university delivery and health delivery being more integrated. Our investments in the Taree hospital are a good example of doing that, and we are looking forward to that proving to be successful and to being able to emulate that in other places.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Minister, the member for Petrie has the call, but did you want to continue?

Ms ROXON—I just want to quickly address something. I will not take the whole five minutes, I can assure the member for Petrie. Some questions were asked of the parliamentary secretary about organ and tissue donation. I understand—although we are happy either way—as to the etiquette, that the parliamentary secretaries cannot be asked questions. But I think he is more than happy to talk with you and answer them.

Let me say, for the record, though: it is not an appropriate forum for us to be discussing an individual past employee’s record. We are quite happy to make available to you the information that is appropriately available publicly. I am also quite happy to explore whether a brief-
ing can be provided to the opposition. But I do not think that talking about an individual em-
ployee—a statutory office-holder, actually, who has resigned—is an appropriate thing for us
to be canvassing in this sort of environment. We would not do that in question time and I do
not think it is appropriate for us to do it here.

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (8.04 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, can I ask the minister to
take those questions on notice, then?

**Ms ROXON** (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.04 pm)—I am certainly
happy to take those questions on notice, and I am certainly happy to provide any information
that can be appropriately provided. We are very comfortable about the work that this agency is
doing. We are pleased that it has had bipartisan support. The only thing I am concerned about
here is an individual person’s privacy and just making sure that I am not breaching some of
those standards on the run. But we are quite happy to provide information to you as appropri-
ate and we can do that either by way of briefing or on notice. We will discuss with you after-
wards which you would prefer.

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (8.05 pm)—This goes to the heart of the parliament’s ability
to scrutinise an authority. The questions are about whether the department had any concerns
about the authority’s administration and whether audits were conducted into the administra-
tion of an authority. This goes to the heart of the parliament’s ability to scrutinise a govern-
ment budget and to scrutinise a government department, and I ask that the minister take these
questions on notice.

**Ms ROXON** (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.06 pm)—I have undertaken
to take those questions on notice and I am happy to do that. I do flag that, similar to the mem-
ber for Dickson’s questions, these are not budget measures from this year’s budget. If you
cannot ask these questions in question time, or if you do not want to ask them in any other
way, we are happy to provide you with that information. But I am not going to be in the posi-
tion where we discuss an individual statutory office holder who is no longer in the employ of
the Commonwealth. Obviously, I would like to take advice to make sure that I am providing
the appropriate information to you. I am more than happy to do that and more than happy to
assume that your continued support for the campaign in relation to us increasing the rates of
organ donation will continue.

**Mrs D’ATH** (Petrie) (8.06 pm)—My question concerning the 2010-11 Commonwealth
budget is about the Rudd government’s commitment to massively increase funding for the
health workforce. The minister has a firsthand knowledge of how important the health work-
force is to my local community, having twice visited the Redcliffe Hospital to talk with health
professionals and to turn the sod for the Redcliffe GP superclinic, to be known as the Moreton
Bay Integrated Care Centre.

I heard from the member for Lyne before that he would like a GP superclinic in his area,
but he also wants a clinic that focuses on training. I suggest to the member for Lyne that I
have the best practice model to use as far as building a GP superclinic and training are con-
cerned, because my superclinic is being built by the Redcliffe Hospital Foundation and part-
nering with the University of Queensland’s School of Medicine. Consequently, not only will it
be providing services to its GP medical centre seven days a week up to 10 pm at night on hos-
pital grounds, taking the pressure off the emergency department, but it will also be training
GPs and nurses and have a dental school, with specialist training going on throughout the centre.

One of the things I was most surprised about as a new member of parliament was the poor state our workforce planning was left in by the now Leader of the Opposition. Until the election of the Rudd Labor government, there was a freeze on GP training places right across Australia. At a time when we had a shortage of GPs in the community, the Liberal Party actually imposed a cap on the number of training places for GPs. The Leader of the Opposition is also responsible for the legacy of a shortage of nurses in the community. This is a health system that he says was in good shape in November 2007. Can the health minister outline to the House the work that this Rudd government is doing to turn around the disastrous state workforce planning was left in after 12 years of a Liberal government?

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (8.09 pm)—My question concerning the 2010-11 Commonwealth budget specifically concerns the Rudd government’s $466.7 million commitment to e-health. I am sure that everyone in the House was witness to the support this decision received from the community. For many years, governments of both political persuasions have supported the concept of e-health. In fact, I was at a street corner meeting a couple of weeks ago in Huntfield Heights in which this issue was raised, and people at the meeting were a little bit confused because they did think that the Leader of the Opposition, previously the health minister, was in favour of e-health records. They certainly were in favour of it. So they were very confused about why the Leader of the Opposition has changed his tune.

I understand that the Leader of the Opposition staked his credibility as health minister on delivering an e-health system. This commitment, like so many others that he made in health, has been shown to be nothing more than hollow rhetoric. Certainly, that seems to be the takeaway message that constituents in my electorate got. Can the minister please outline the benefits that e-health will bring to the health system and the potential risks of this irresponsible decision by the Liberal Party to scrap funding of this project?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.10 pm)—I thank the member for Petrie and the member for Kingston for those questions. I will take them both together so there is time for further questions.

Obviously, the member for Petrie is a very passionate advocate for training the health workforce. I must say that the University of Queensland’s involvement in the Redcliffe superclinic—building it essentially as a training facility as well as a provider of services—is an exciting part of that project. Some health professionals will be trained in Petrie who have never been trained in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. I think it is a great breakthrough, because—as in the situations in the Northern Territory, Tasmania and elsewhere—if we train people in areas where there are shortages, there is a better chance that they will enjoy that experience and decide to stay and then we will start dealing with some of the serious problems of a lack of a decent distribution of the health workforce. Unfortunately, that is a big part of a legacy that we inherited from the previous government.

There is $632 million in this budget to enhance our training for GPs, specialists, nurses and allied health professionals. Some of these programs are to provide local relief in rural areas; others are to simply make sure that we can train enough GPs. We need a big increase in the number of graduates who see general practice as a good opportunity for them in the future. We were very excited with the response that we received not just from the public but also...
from the stakeholders, because reform in health, and even investments in health, can be controversial, but to have the AMA, the ANF, the college of general practice and the Australian Medical Students Association—just to name a few—all coming out in such strong support of this initiative is a credit to our strategy.

We have had to invest in areas that were seriously neglected by our predecessors. That includes, in last year’s budget, funding the health workforce agency, established in South Australia—the parliamentary secretary’s state—and proper planning with regard to the needs of the health workforce. It also includes things like the rural incentives that come online from 1 July this year, which will help, again, with the distribution. We are very excited about the opportunities this provides. There is a lot more to be done but, with the support of good local training providers like we are seeing established at the Redcliffe superclinic, we will be able to really turn this around.

The member for Kingston asked a question relating to the budget and a very significant investment, $467 million—that is, nearly half a billion dollars. That is money that should have been committed by the previous government but never was. It is money that should have been committed even according to the Leader of the Opposition’s own measure as the health minister. Not only is this now many years late, but we are in the extraordinary position where the Liberal opposition has said that they would cut this funding. This is something that every expert across the country and every health service provider says they desperately need. Whether you are working in a rural and remote area, whether you are working across multidisciplinary teams, whether you are working in the area of professional healthcare that the member for Kingston previously worked in, you would know that being able to have electronic health records is a key that will unlock so many future opportunities that to stand in the way of this is just sheer madness. I have to say that it smacks a little bit of, ‘We didn’t do it so we’re just not going to let anybody else get on with the job.’

This is a problem and will present great problems in the community. I know that the shadow minister is aware of this. Perhaps he has been rolled by the shadow finance minister. This is an important investment in our future. It should be supported. It will be a great risk, I think, in the campaign—something that people will focus on—when we are asked, ‘What are your health reforms going to deliver compared to what the Liberal Party are offering?’ At the moment all they are offering to do is take it away and spend it on something else not health related. That is all that we know so far. That would obviously be a great disservice to the community.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (8.15 pm)—I wonder if the minister could outline to us the detail in relation to the bringing nurses back program, which was closed in the budget. Minister, how many nurses in total were recruited for hospitals and separately for aged care under this program before its closure?

Could the minister also provide detail to the House in relation to the outcomes of some of the Indigenous workforce measures—both what the projections were and what the outcomes have been?

Could the minister also outline to the House, with reference to the $355.2 million allocated in the budget to 23 GP superclinics, whether or not those superclinics will be located in areas of workforce shortage? Is she able to outline to the House the detail of the grants as part of that $355 million measure—that is, the way in which those grants will operate, what the crite-
ria will be for how the money will be paid, what it will be paid for and how that money is separated from the 23 GP superclinics? How is the $355 million apportioned?

I wonder also whether or not the minister could, as part of her response, provide a guarantee that local clinicians will be involved in the local networks in which they work.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.17 pm)—I am happy to answer those questions. Seven hundred and sixty-four nurses were provided with support from Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce. There were 150 aged-care nurses. I am just seeking confirmation as to whether that number is included in the 764 or whether it is on top of the 764.

Obviously, we are pleased that we have been able to support more than 700 nurses back into nursing. Obviously, we are disappointed that it is not even more. We do not think that this program achieved the objective that we would have hoped for it. That is why the program has been closed and it is why we, through consultations with the nursing sector, have now supported through this budget a package of far more extensive nursing programs, a lot of them being upskilling ones about keeping people satisfied in the workplace and about expanding support—for example, in aged care—in areas where we are keenly aware that more support is needed.

That information is available. Of course, in a perfect world you would have thousands of nurses who currently work as waitresses or secretaries or who are not working at all using their skills in nursing. One of the most important ways for us to be able to turn that around is to get our investments in health and hospitals right and to make sure that we are improving working conditions for people in hospitals and in our health services so that it becomes an ongoing attractive area to work in and the retention problems are reduced.

This is a complex area. Not everything that you do works exactly the way you want it to. But there are more than 700 nurses back in the workforce who would not have been without this program and that is not to be sneezed at. We are comfortable that the new proposals, which were worked on closely with nursing stakeholders, will bring a further benefit to our nursing professions.

I am happy to provide you with some general information on the clinics and the grants. As you would expect, further—

Mr Dutton—The Indigenous measures?

Mr Snowdon—I will do that, mate.

Ms ROXON—About the grants: it probably will not surprise you that we expect to make an announcement relatively soon about the details so that people are able to make their applications, and that process will be public.

We are requiring, as you would expect and as has occurred for the GP Super Clinics Program, that in return for public taxpayers’ money being invested mostly in private facilities there will be an additional benefit to the community—whether it is training more of our workforce, whether it is opening extended hours or a range of those services, they will be part of the guidelines. The split is about half and half. We will make those details available. It is in our thinking that the GP superclinics will range from some of the smaller ones to the more extensive ones. We think it is appropriate to have a little bit of flexibility, because it will de-
pend on applications and expressions of interest that are made. But we believe that there is a great need.

I cannot undertake to the shadow minister that every superclinic will be in an area of workforce shortage, because there are areas of need that may have a combined range of factors that mean it is appropriate to train more of your workforce in a particular area or where there is a very high need for Indigenous services, for example. But obviously that will be a key factor in identifying where services are needed. We have made training, workforce shortages and the needs of disadvantaged communities and fast-growing urban populations our key criteria for the past superclinics and we do not expect that that will greatly change. But detailed announcement will be made in the coming weeks.

I am going to hand over to my colleague the Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery on the Indigenous question. Was there one other issue that was asked?

Mr Dutton—Yes, in relation to the local clinicians being involved in their local networks.

Ms ROXON—Yes, we are happy to absolutely stand by the fact that clinicians should be involved in the management of Local Hospital Networks. The shadow minister would be aware that we have expressed a preference that at all times the best person for the job be chosen. Not at all times will that be a local clinician but many times it will. I do note that there is an exception in this for Victoria, which has a strict requirement that they have used that no local clinician employed in a Local Hospital Network would be then on their boards. We are not seeking to have Victoria change that arrangement—nor, it seems, any of the professional groups—but we would obviously keep an eye on that. But for an arrangement that it seems the community and health professionals have accepted, we understand that they have made that decision to avoid conflicts of interest. We think that that can be provided in a number of different ways just by following proper corporate governance to ensure that conflicts of interest do not occur and we are absolutely determined that clinicians should have a very significant role in the management of Local Hospital Networks.

The Minister for Ageing has just provided the total number of 764 nurses—that is inclusive of the 150 in aged care.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery) (8.22 pm)—I thank the member for his question. You were asking about Indigenous health workforce development and the number of people who will be trained.

Mr Dutton—Yes, outcomes in each of the programs of workforce in your portfolio.

Mr SNOWDON—I will give you the specific outcomes in each area on notice. But what I will tell you is that in 2010 the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship will support over 290 Indigenous Australians to study in medicine, nursing, dentistry, allied health and Aboriginal health worker disciplines. Through the COAG national partnership and closing the gap initiatives we will be funding 83 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach worker positions, of which 40 will be positions in Aboriginal medical services. We will be funding 94 FTE new Indigenous health project officers in the divisions of general practice. At least 96 people, not FTE, have now been recruited to those positions, of whom 38 are identified as being Indigenous Australians. We have appointed a new National Coordinator for Tackling Indigenous
Smoking, who of course is Tom Calma. We have put together a $19 million package over three years to strengthen the capacity of the Indigenous health workforce. This will support the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association and the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Nurses to expand the work of mentoring and networking young Indigenous doctors and nurses. We are providing additional training opportunities for Aboriginal health workers. We are supporting the National Aboriginal Health Worker Association, which has recently been formed, and ensuring that Indigenous health is expanded into the curriculum in medical and allied health and nursing schools. The Aboriginal health workforce is at the top of our agenda in terms of providing pathways for Aboriginal people into the health professions and we are consciously examining new and innovative ways of getting people into that workforce. I will provide you with that other stuff on notice.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (8.24 pm)—My question concerning the 2010-11 budget is about the Rudd government’s $7.3 billion investment in our health and hospital system. After 12 years of neglect and underinvestment by the Liberal and National parties federally, can the Minister for Health and Ageing outline to the House what health reform means for communities across Australia? I know that in my electorate people are really thrilled about these health and hospital reforms. In particular, can the minister outline what specific funding has been allocated to our hospital system? I know that my electorate is very keen to hear about that.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.25 pm)—I thank the member for her question. We are pleased that the $7.3 billion of additional health investments is not only funding national programmes, such as the ones my colleagues have spoken about in Indigenous health, aged care, Medicare and the PBS, but also supporting individual communities. We are starting to see the flow of that funding, for example in the announcement I was able to make today at Wollongong Hospital.

In Tasmania the investments are also very significant. Under the health care agreement negotiated in 2008, where we saw a 50 per cent increase in funding following the pulling out of money by the previous government, Tasmania received an extra $1.3 billion for its health and hospital services. With the new health care agreement on top of that, Tasmania will receive an additional $458 million and benefit from the Commonwealth’s taking on an increasing share of funding, which means that an additional $340 million will flow to the benefit of Tasmanians.

We can see and break down the funding in all sorts of different areas. For example, there is the emergency department money—$3.5 million—which is already flowing to the Royal Hobart Hospital and the $3.7 million for the north of the member for Franklin’s state which is going to the emergency department development at North West Regional Hospital in Burnie. There will be more funding from this year’s budget with the money beginning to roll out across the community from 1 July this year. For example, there is another $11 million to help support the rollout of the four-hour target for emergency departments and just under $10 million for capital money as well as money to support almost another 20,000 ED presentations across Tasmania.

Those examples are just from emergency departments, but we could go through the same for elective surgeries and subacute care. In Tasmania, where the population is small but the community is quite widely dispersed, making sure that there are sufficient funds to be able to provide as many services as possible close to people’s homes is very important. The cancer
investments that have been made are very welcome in Tasmania, and we are keen to continue working with our colleagues, who have some particular challenges in elective surgery. There are some long-wait patients in Tasmania, where there are simply not enough specialists available to provide the services, but we are working closely with the Tasmanian government to see how we can use this new investment in hospitals not only to provide better ongoing services but also to help break a backlog accumulated over many years, including those years when the country was under the previous government.

This is part of our determination to invest in health and make sure we deliver better outcomes to the community. We are only able to do this as a result of our very careful work during the economic crisis. We now have our budget in a good position, where we are able to make investments of over $7 billion in health, and that will be welcome in the community, because we know that families across the country—particularly older Australians—rely desperately on our health services and these investments, particularly in our hospitals, will make an enormous difference to those members of the community.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (8.29 pm)—My question is again to the minister. I wonder if the minister can update the House about negotiations with Western Australia. What contact has there been at a first minister level? What will happen to funding arrangements for Western Australia post 1 July? What is the government’s latest thinking in relation to the way in which that will happen? Will Western Australian patients be put at a disadvantage because the Commonwealth will not be in a position to properly settle arrangements? Has the government received any legal advice about any impediments if Western Australia does not sign up to the Commonwealth’s agreement as it currently stands? Will the so-called local networks work as statutory authorities or mere advisory bodies? I would like to know about the legal standing or the corporate governance arrangements in relation to those committees.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (8.31 pm)—On the same question, if I can add a little, if the minister intends to delegate the appointment of the networks to the state government, how does that fit within the Commonwealth’s view of taking control of health in the states? If the states appoint these authorities and they do not have independent statutory authorities, won’t the control ultimately be vested in the state government, and then it will be back to business as usual? I reinforce what the shadow minister said. Will these boards, networks or whatever you like to call them have independent statutory authority?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.31 pm)—I can encourage both the shadow minister and the member for Hinkler to actually read the announcements that have been made. These local hospital networks will be set up under statute by the states. That is an express part of the agreement that was reached at COAG on 20 April—of course with the exception of Western Australia, who are yet to agree to this arrangement. The shadow minister who is asking about discussions between the Commonwealth and the Western Australian government obviously will not be surprised that I would not publicly discuss every detail of those discussions.

Mr Dutton—When was the last discussion you had?

Ms ROXON—I am answering his question, and if he will let me finish I will provide that answer. I am not going to go through all of the detail, as it would not be appropriate, but I can provide you with plenty of that detail. I spoke as recently as last Tuesday to the health minister in Western Australia. We speak regularly. He was in the north of the state when I was in
Tasmania, on other business that he had committed to previously. There was a meeting, nevertheless, between our officials. I cannot answer for discussions between first ministers, officials and others. I understand that the Prime Minister and the Premier did not meet on this particular visit, but I also understand that Premier Barnett has recently and publicly stated that he does agree with health reforms but he does not agree with the GST arrangements that are part of the package that was agreed with the other states and territories. I do not think it is a national secret. That has been the Western Australian government’s view for some time.

When I was in Western Australia last week I made clear and itemised which parts of the national health and hospital reforms plan and funding would flow to Western Australia irrespective of whether it signed the agreement. More than $300 million is in that category, because it goes to things like the GP training money, practice nurse incentives and diabetes initiatives—a large number of the things, I might add, that the Liberal Party opposes. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth would provide that money to Western Australia irrespective of whether Premier Barnett signs. There is, however, another $352 million which we want to be able to provide to the Western Australian community, which we stand ready to provide as soon as Western Australia signs the agreement.

I have made clear that our view is that the best way that money will be spent is cooperatively with the Western Australian government. However, if that is not possible, we have our minds open to being able to provide this money in other ways which would benefit the Western Australian community. We are not going to have the community held hostage by a Premier that may not sign. We nevertheless believe that it is in everyone’s interest—particularly the Western Australian community—that these additional funds do flow. I have not yet given up hope that there may be an opportunity for us to reach agreement. I think it is still too early for us to be able to tell whether or not that can be done in a sufficiently timely way. We certainly have legal advice that there is no impediment to us proceeding with establishing the National Health and Hospitals Network in other states and territories of the country, and we intend to do that, whether Western Australia is part of these arrangements or not.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 8.35 pm
QUESTIONs IN WRITING

Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme
(Question No. 1295)

Mr Robert asked the Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, in writing on 11 March 2010:

(1) Would he consider bringing forward the start date of the Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme to enable key staff employed under the (discontinued) Home Insulation Program to remain employed.

(2) By what date will insulation installers be able to reregister under this (replacement) Scheme.

(3) Will the Government consider buying back surplus stock holdings that bona fide insulation companies purchased for use under the (discontinued) Home Insulation Program.

(4) What sort of information on the Program/Scheme changeover is provided by the Government’s hotlines.

(5) By what date will the Government pay insulation providers the money they are owed under the former Program.

Mr Combet—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) On 22 April 2010, I announced that the insulation component of the Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme would not proceed. This decision was made following advice received from Dr Allan Hawke in his Review of the Administration of the Home Insulation Program. In his report, Dr Hawke noted that “the safety and quality risks cannot be fully abated and both the Government’s efforts and those of reputable industry players will be largely deployed on the Government’s rectification program, which must proceed as soon as possible.”

(2) See above answer to part (1). On 1 April 2010, I announced the Government’s Home Insulation Safety Plan. A key element of the plan is the Home Insulation Safety Program (HISP). Participation in this program will be an opportunity for long-standing, reputable insulation firms and their workers. The HISP will also assist in restoring confidence in the insulation retrofitting industry in the longer term.

(3) On 6 May 2010, I announced the $15 million Insulation Industry Assistance Package to provide financial assistance to reputable insulation businesses for inventory held when the Home Insulation Program (HIP) was terminated on 19 February 2010. This package will help offset the industry’s inventory costs.

(4) A number of hotlines have been established to assist householders and installers with queries relating to the discontinued HIP.

The Safety Hotline 13 17 92 provides information relating to safety inspections (foil and non-foil).

Two phone numbers, 13 17 64 (employers) and 13 28 50 (employees), have been established to provide information on the Government’s $41.2 million Insulation Worker’s Adjustment Package.

The Installer Hotline 1800 029 686 provides information relating to outstanding payments for work carried out under the discontinued HIP.

The AusIndustry hotline 13 28 46 provides information about the Insulation Industry Assistance Package.

The Energy Efficiency Homes Package Hotline 1800 808 571 provides general information on the discontinued HIP.

(5) The Government is committed to finalising the processing and payment of all eligible and compliant claims as quickly as possible. However, there is evidence of non-compliance and fraud under
the HIP. Thorough investigation of instances of possible fraud or non-compliance is essential to ensure that payments of Commonwealth funds are appropriate. The Department has appointed a team of forensic auditors and deployed additional staff to carry out audit and compliance work to complete this work as expeditiously as possible.

Roads: Marulan
(Question No. 1329)

Mr Abbott asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 11 May 2010:

In respect of the project to upgrade the at-grade crossing on the Hume Highway and George Street, Marulan, NSW:

(1) What public consultations took place before and after the Government provided funding.

(2) What performance outcomes or measures did the Government tie to the allocation of funding.

(3) Was the Goulburn Mulwaree Council consulted about this project before or after Government funding was provided.

(4) How will road and community safety be enhanced by this project.

(5) When is the project scheduled to be completed and at what cost to the Government.

Mr Albanese—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The upgrading of this intersection is funded by the NSW Government, and as such, the honourable member’s question is a matter for the NSW Government.

Roads: Bruce Highway
(Question No. 1330)

Mr Truss asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 11 May 2010:

Is it a fact that the report on the social and financial considerations used in making the decision to build Section B of the Cooroy to Curra upgrade of the Bruce Highway on the eastern alignment cannot be released until it has been approved by the Australian Government; if so, by what date will the Australian Government approve the release of the report.

Mr Albanese—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The Australian Government is investing $688 million to upgrade the section of the Bruce Highway between Cooroy to Curra. Construction is now underway following 12 years of inaction by the previous government.